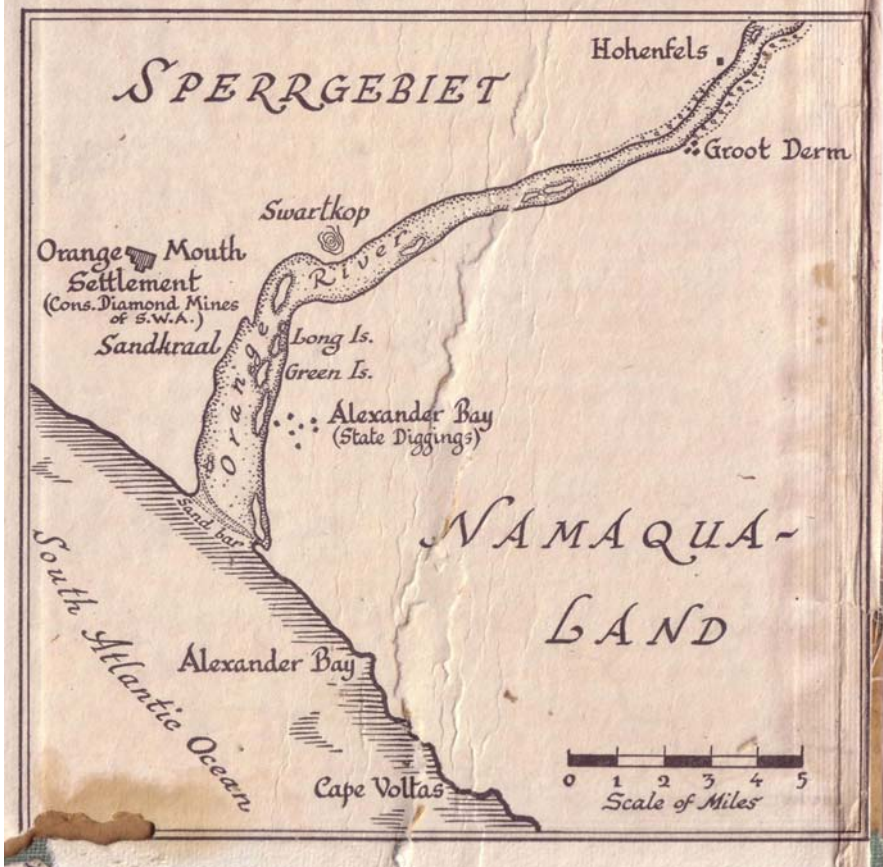
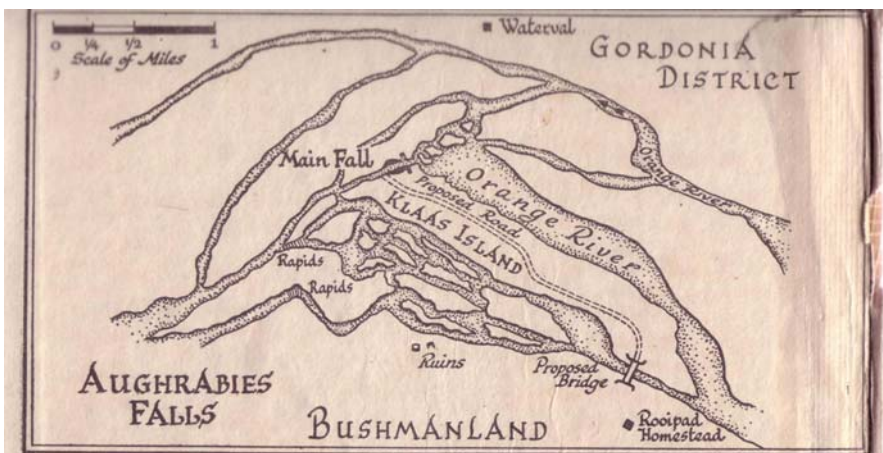
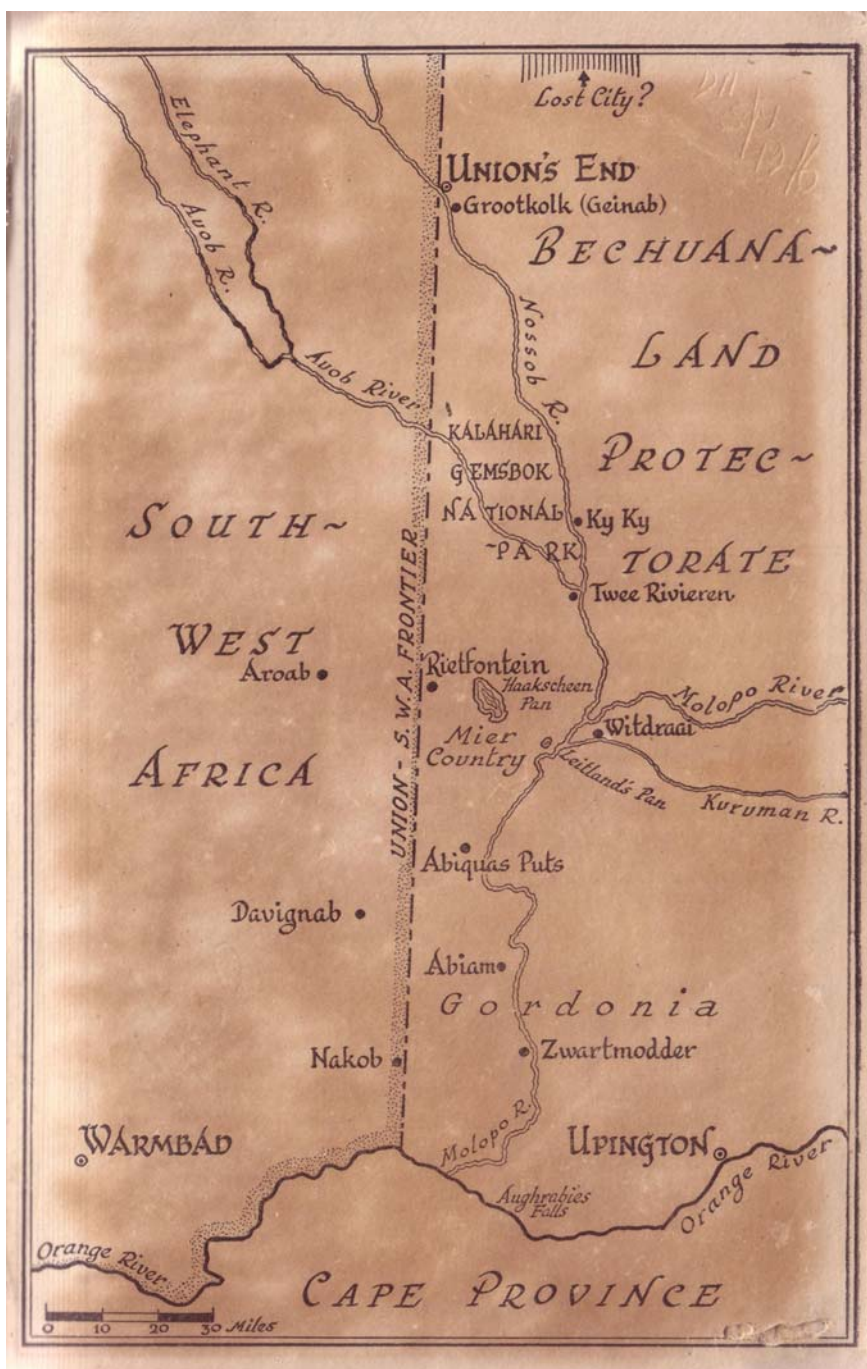


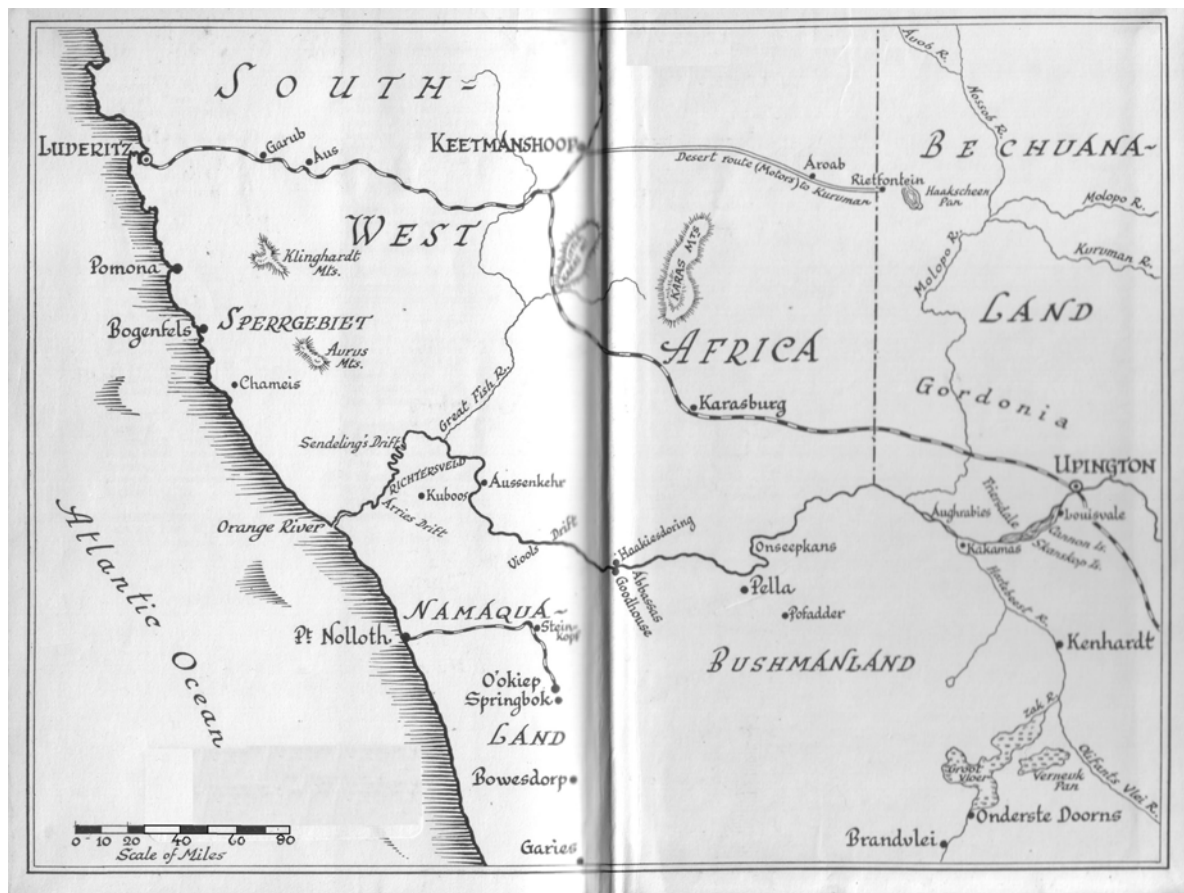
To the River's End

Lawrence G. Green









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AUTHOR'S NOTE

“To The River’s End” was first published in 1948. Naturally there have been changes along the Orange River since then and some of the fine old characters who told me their tales of adventure have passed on. Thank heaven I was able to save something of those remarkable lives for posterity. This edition is produced by photo-lithographic process, which means that it is a replica of a previous edition. For that reason I have not been able to make alterations or corrections. Looking through the book, however, I find that the narrative has come through the years without calling for many drastic changes.

Lawrence G. GREEN.



Beacon at Union's End, where the Cape Province meets Bechuanaland and South-West Africa

CHAPTER 1

UNION'S END

THIS, YOU WOULD SAY, is the end of all things, and indeed it is almost within a rifle-shot of the last, remote beacon marked on the largest maps of South Africa as Union's End.

Union's End! There is a name for you, like Ultima Thule and Cape Horn, Finisterre and Cape Farewell. I have driven nearly a thousand miles from Cape Town, more than four hundred miles into the Kalahari, to reach Union's End. And now, soon after arrival, I am lost.

To understand my plight you should be able to visualise Union's End. Probably you have never heard of it before, and even a "Brains Trust" might be hard put to it to fix the position. In fact, it is nothing more than a beacon and a borehole, set in what the old desert travellers called "park-like country." Only here there are no gates, fences or park-keepers. Later, if I fail to find my way back to camp, I may long for any symbol of civilisation. At the moment I am lost, but in no

way alarmed. I still have a full water-bottle, a rifle, cartridges, a box of matches and cigarettes. My compass, however, is safely stowed away with my kit in camp.

I was telling you about Union's End. Three territories meet at this point - the Union, South-West Africa and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. I believe the surveyor who fixed the position of this spot also gave it the appropriate name. Not very many white people have been here to admire the beacon since the surveyor raised it. The bore-hole is four hundred feet deep, and Bushmen sometimes make use of it. I cannot say that the bore-hole was sunk for their benefit; it was authorised long before anyone thought of the welfare of wild Bushmen. Nevertheless, the Bushmen came upon it, and these ingenious little people then linked up the longest gemsbok riem ever seen in the Kalahari and secured water at Union's End.

That, I imagine, is the only historic event at Union's End worth recording. The dry bed of the Nossob River passes through the place; and it is

also neatly intersected by the twentieth parallel of longitude. All round Union's End are the dimes, the kameeldoorn and mimosa trees, the pans, the vast expanse of sand that undulates like an ocean, a waterless ocean. All round, but unseen at the moment, are lions and herds of game.

Union's End is not much of a metropolis, but I would prefer to be standing beside the beacon now to being lost on this unmapped patch of veld. I could walk back to camp from Union's End simply by following the dry watercourse southwards. If I start walking from where I have halted I may easily become a mystery and a legend, like Colonel Fawcett.

My predicament arises out of some instinct which I am not disposed to analyse too deeply. I like a romantic explanation when I can find a plausible one; and this afternoon, when I left the car in the river bed and followed a herd of springbok over the rise, I thought of myself as a voortrekker hunting his meat in a new country.

Now I know better. A voortrekker would have found his way out of this corner by now, whereas I am here. Still, I have the springbok as an excuse. No one born in South Africa can fail to react to the sight of the finest of all the world's antelope. They went "pronking" over the rise, the large ones weighing eighty pounds apiece - and it is my ambition to take a sack of springbok biltong back to Cape Town with me. That is not the way to preserve our vanishing game, I know; but I want the biltong.

Those springbok got me into this situation. I was fascinated by the lyre-shaped horns, the dark-brown stripes on their sides, the white bellies, and above all by the white blaze of the manes they raised on their arched backs. They held their heads low as they bounded over the rise, and all the time I had the sights of my rifle up and I walked fast after them and waited for a safe shot at a hundred yards.

I thought they would halt on the rise, silhouetted on the skyline. Instead, I saw them for the last time leaping ten feet in the air. I heard a shrill

whistle of fright, as though they knew I was after them with soft-nosed bullets. Then they went over the rise, and I never saw them again. They were wiser than I was, for they knew where they were going.

It is time to send out my first distress signal. I fire shot after shot at regular intervals, a sort of Kalahari salute, until the magazine is empty. Then I listen keenly. At this moment the sound of answering shots would be reassuring; but nothing breaks the great hush that rests over the bleak country round Union's End. The sun has gone, and I have not even noted the spot where it dropped over the dunes.

Far the first time I glance at my water-bottle. Instead of drinking, however, I light a cigarette and smoke thoughtfully. Smoking will not increase my thirst, I tell myself. The men in the Treveassa's boats, I read somewhere, had plenty of cigarettes but little water. They lived for a month on water measured out in the lid of a cigarette tin, they smoked a lot, and it never made them thirstier. I always wondered why

they did not put more water in the boats, and fewer cigarettes. But now I am in the same position ... one water-bottle and one tin of nearly twenty cigarettes. It is no use being wise after the event.

The burning end of my cigarette reminds me that I still have another way of making my position known. It is not yet dark, and I look round for bonfire materials. Not far ahead is a tree broken down under the weight of a nest built by social weaver birds. There must have been hundreds of pairs of birds under this decayed roof; but now the nest is within reach of the jackals, and the prudent birds have departed. I wish to be certain on this point, so I walk all round the nest kicking it with my top-boots and prodding with the butt of my rifle. Not a protest. The first match sends up a sheet of flame in the growing darkness. No longer do I feel alone.

This is a satisfying blaze, and to add to the dramatic effect I ram a new clip of cartridges into the magazine and fire another Kalahari

salute. This, I think, will do the trick. The whole veld is lit up, and I have to retreat from the roaring, crackling nest. But still there is no answering signal.

Start a fire in the long desert grass and there is no knowing where it will end. I had forgotten that. The blaze spreads beyond the broken tree, and I find myself frantically clearing a firepath - and all to no purpose. For a time that fire worries me. My friends, I imagine, cannot fail to see the inferno; but where will it end? I stand away from the heat, rest my dazzled eyes, stare into the darkness, listen intently, and finally discover no signs of approaching rescuers.

After a time, to my surprise, the fire dies down. I count my cartridges, keep a full box for emergencies, and fire three shots. For some reason. this procedure makes me think of the man who sold me the rifle I am carrying. It is a military rifle with a match-barrel, and I wish the previous owner could see me now. He is a retired police sergeant named Birch; a man who knows this desert well, though most of his

police career was spent in Bushmanland. He gave me valuable advice with the rifle, did Birch, and I have remembered enough of it to avoid walking round in circles. But what would Birch do now?

I decide that Birch would wait for daylight, take his direction from the rising sun, and then walk steadily westwards towards the dry river. Probably, with his desert sense, Birch would have found his way back in the dark. Hungry as I am, I shall not attempt that. When I say hungry I mean there were Namaqua partridges stewing in a three-legged pot when I left the camp; I was looking forward to a tot of brandy, a dish of partridges, a ship's biscuit, possibly some canned fruit and coffee. This appears to have gone by the board. I am not famished, but I dare not look forward to breakfast, for there may be no breakfast. However, I have one luxury - another cigarette. I hope that my water-bottle may not become a luxury.

Now I have a reasonable fire, one which will not set the veld ablaze. And believe me, I need it.

The cold in this desert is something I have never been able to conquer. I can keep warm only by toasting my hands and toes at this fire. All the way north from Upington we have been frozen at night by the pitiless cold. Sleeping bags, you say? I have two sleeping bags in camp, a blanket, and a leather coat. In spite of all this weight and bulk I have to climb out every night and join other restless, shivering men round the camp fire. At noon it is sometimes warm enough in the dry Kalahari sunshine for shorts. At night I think how comforting it would be to travel through this biting cold in a motor-caravan, with bunks and a stove.

Yes, this is hardship and in a sense it is adventure. When I am wearing my slippers in front of an electric radiator on a rainy night in Cape Town, I long for these spaces. Now I think of a white-tiled bathroom, with a hot tap sending up steam. Yet I am not sorry I came. My present situation is a little disturbing, but I cannot have wandered far from the river and there is no cause for panic. This is a peaceful sort of adventure. I

am regretful only when I think of those Namaqua partridges.

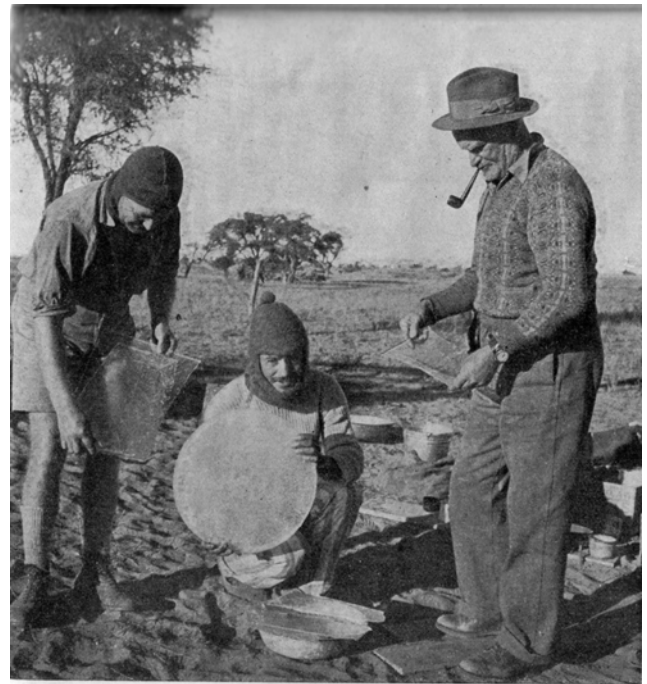
Nevertheless, the mind works faster on an empty stomach and life sometimes tends to form a pattern when you are alone in a wilderness. I console myself with the thought that I have left a great many small irritations behind, south of the Orange River. It took me a long time to discover why I am so contented under the stars in these lonely places. This is not the romantic explanation I prefer; but it rings true. There is no claustrophobia here. Very early in my life an older boy in the neat bed at boarding-school formed the enjoyable habit of waking me by pressing a pillow over my face. Perhaps it was that, or something else with a lost origin. My claustrophobia has never been acute enough to take to a psycho-analyst. But I have a distaste, rather than a fear of confined spaces. I feel it in London, when I see millions of people scuttling about in a rabbit-warren of tube railways and overcrowded buildings. Though I am happy at sea, I would refuse to go down in a diving-suit or

submarine. Several times in my life I have visited mines, including deep gold mines on the Rand. My imagination got to work long before I stepped into the cage. Have you ever been down a mine? Steel bars clang against steel, there are bell signals, and then they drop you four thousand feet in two minutes. The wind rushes past, but it is a dark and unfriendly wind. "Hold your noses and blow if you feel the pressure," says the mine official in the cage. "Now she's slowing up. You can feel the play in the steel cable as the cage rises and falls like a boat." To me, these sensations are devastating. I can think of no good reason why a civilised world should demand that thousands of South Africans and many thousands of Africans should work in this unnatural tomb. It is a Frankenstein we have raised in South Africa, and one day we must return to more sensible toil. I am lost, but I am far more comfortable in my mind than I was in that tomb. If there was labour here, native labour, the long fingers would reach out of the tomb and even Union's end would not escape the

touch. I am thankful because the unambitious Bushman will not work.

They will have eaten the partridges by now, and I must find some consolation to take the place of my missing supper. With the next cigarette comes the soothing thought that I am not an exile. Perhaps this sounds queer to you. I am one of those South Africans who develop a nostalgia when I am away, even for a time, from my country. Here at least the melancholy of distance cannot disturb me. Lost on this veld, I am more at home than I was that morning in Berlin when I left a night club at daybreak and saw a man standing on the edge of the pavement with blood dripping from his forehead into the gutter. There had been a fight, they told me, a street fight between the rising forces of Nazi gangsters and the police. It was 1931, and even then, as I walked back to the Excelsior, I knew that it was in an insane world and that I had gone far enough into Europe. I still prefer Union's End to Unter den Linden.

As I sit here with the doors of memory wide open, I realise that there is another reason why the Kalahari country has such a strong appeal for me. This scene goes back to my earliest years, when I roamed among the thorn trees at Alexandersfontein. The sand is the same colour as the sand round Kimberley, the air has a familiar feel, there is an indefinable odour which has set my thoughts racing tonight. I have an indistinct memory of a journey by ox-wagon. Though I am not given to vain regrets, I would have lived more fully on this veld in the oxwagon days. Andrew A. Anderson, who lived in his wagon for twenty-five years, trekked across the Kalahari many times and enjoyed the great peace. "A life in the desert is certainly most charming with all its drawbacks, for the mind can have unlimited action", wrote Anderson. Perhaps that is why my thoughts are ranging so far tonight. The pace has slowed down to nothing. I have time to think, and one can cover much ground in an hour.



Ice in the Kalahari—a camp scene on the dry
Nossob river

I seem to be watching tented wagons passing my fire. Some of the Thirstland trekkers followed this route on the long and dangerous trail to Angola. I can almost hear the creaking of their wheels.

The white bucksails are clear enough, and the will-o'-the-wisp of a voorloper's storm-lantern. That must be a white ox in the team, surely called Witzenberg. "Hot, Bandom! Haar Donker!" "Over the oxen whistles the twenty-foot whip-lash, and the lumbering wagon moves on through the sand. Somewhere under those tents there must be men with powder horns and the long, formidable Boer guns called "roers." The water-vaatjies will be swinging from hooks beneath the wagons, and I hope they are full. These are people of high courage - but it is a long way between water-holes in the country round Union's End.

They are seeking a land without fences. They are finding it; and long afterwards, so am I. Strange to say, there is no loneliness in this vast land. To me, that is the most surprising discovery of all. I

have been lonely in hotel bedrooms, especially the soulless bedroom that looks out on to a blank wall. Once in New York a ghastly thought came to me. Suppose, I said to myself, suppose I was condemned to spend the rest of my life in these deep canyons of Manhattan, among these hard faced crowds, with the elevated railways shattering my ears and the summer heat burning up from the pavement as no African sun ever scorched me. What then? I went to the shipping office, found a freighter sailing direct from New York to Cape Town, paid my fare and cast out a devil that had entered my brain.

Here I am lost but not lonely. The Kalahari, in spite of its dryness, is not hostile. I can find nothing malevolent, even in the dunes. The size of the desert is tremendous, but never does it awe me like the towers of New York or the chimneypots of London. Once I listened to two doctors arguing about claustrophobia. One declared that no man who lived in a crowded city could remain normal, and that in the open spaces, neurasthenia was unknown. The other

pointed out that for some people solitude could be disastrous, and he gave examples. No doubt both were right. I have no wish to remain in this intense isolation for ever. Even on the fringe of the desert there are places where I should find myself putting a time limit on the length of my stay. To be honest, I am no A. A. Anderson, but merely a bird of passage in this wilderness. Yet I can say, after many such journeys, that I have never found myself longing for city pavements as I yearned for South Africa on that day in New York. "A great city means a great loneliness," says the Greek proverb. Here I am lost and alone, but not lonely.

How long, I think idly, will my water-bottle last? The thought is bound to enter my head, but at the moment there is still no urgency about it. My mouth is moist enough, and I can smoke another cigarette with pleasure. The fire is burning high enough to be seen at a distance in this land where fires are so rare. In the Sahara in the hot weather, so they say,

nineteen hours without water is enough to kill a man. The Kalahari winter is not so deadly. And then I have heard of ways of finding water. "Look for a forked, decayed tree with a deep hole in the trunk," an old desert hand once told me. "It is often possible to suck water out of such trees." On some of the well-known desert routes in this region-the "Great Thirst," they call it - trees holding water are blazed. I have seen maps with the blazed trees marked. Only I am not on any route. It is possible that no man has ever trodden this ground before, and I wonder when the next man will set foot on this exact spot.

The night is arousing my imagination, but not unpleasantly. I am able to dramatise the simple situation without seeing my own skeleton picked clean by the vultures. I remember an advertisement I saw in an American newspaper, offering for a dollar a pamphlet entitled "How to Overcome the Fear of Death." That must have been a flourishing mail-order business, but they did not get my dollar.

Here in the desert I am so healthy that I am unaware of my body. No one brings a tray of tea to my sleeping bag in the morning. I have to crawl out and dip my enamel mug into a pannikin of coffee; and the harsh mixture includes some of the Kalahari sand. For breakfast I empty a cold tin of sardines on to a hard biscuit. For lunch there is the interminable venison, much too fresh, and tough as only fresh springbok can be. I have left all my whims far behind. I can eat desert fare and be thankful for a boiled potato. There is magic in the odour of woodsmoke, most primitive of the whole range of the odours that play havoc with our emotions. Men and dogs, so it is said, travel back a long way in the woodsmoke. Yes, it is the woodsmoke that draws men into the wilderness, into the desert and veld and wherever there are mountains to climb; they are drugged by a strong vapour, their impulses are affected, and they carry away memories that the city years cannot obliterate. Try to remember the firesides you have sat round in arm-chairs; you cannot remember. But think of your camp fires, and the

whole circle of faces becomes sharp, the tales that were told are still vivid, the past lives again.

I am not going to ignore the other side of the picture. The words of a famous Kalahari traveller and scientist, Professor E. H. L. Schwarz, come back to me. Schwarz was not only a student of rainfall; he also observed his fellow-men, and he summed up what he saw in certain desert places with grim phrases. "Some disaster or another is linked with nearly every one of these desert stations," he wrote. "Those who sit at home envying the free life of these pioneers cannot realise how ghastly it really is, nor what infinite fortitude it requires of a man if he is to come through the ordeal unscathed."

It was not until I read those words that my subconscious mind stirred and I understood at last the reason for the spell which lonely places have always cast over me. Now I know that I am not here to shoot springbok and gemsbok; that the dunes topped by their t'samma melons, the sands of these unfenced frontiers only form a background. It is that "infinite fortitude" I am

seeking all the time. When I was twenty I started marking a map of the world with my tracks, underlining the cities and islands I had seen; and even then I had touched the outer marches and glimpsed men passing through the ordeal of loneliness. Even then I had sensed tragedy or recognised the unscathed. That is why I am here near Union's End, discovering truth in a place as wild as any I have seen. "Infinite fortitude" ... there is something rare and precious, and I shall go on seeking it, and admiring it every time I am successful in finding it. I am always trying to analyse it, like a prospector who sees the gleams of gold in his pan. That is an even more difficult process than the discovery, and sometimes the answer is bound to elude me.

The first educated man I met living in extreme isolation is dead. I must be vague about this, for his widow is living. He was a clergyman, and he had agreed to work in a remote parish for three years. Take my word for it, that place offered the most heart-rendering monotony, and I do not think he went willingly, with his eyes open.

There was a call for a volunteer, and someone pushed him into it. When I visited him he had been there for twelve months. If there had been the slightest excuse for leaving decently, he would have gone then. He was nagging his wife about small matters, and I could see that living far from civilisation had done his nerves no good. "I'll go next time there's a chance," he told me. The next chance came two years later; and if he had known that, I am sure he would not have waited. He had carried out his undertaking without meaning to do it. It must have taken "infinite fortitude" to remain on after the first year, and no doubt his religion had helped; but the painful exile had finished him physically, and soon after returning to civilisation he died. Not many men are called upon to undergo an ordeal of the same degree, though I know others who faced life in that distant parish and survived.

All along this Kalahari frontier are men who deal often with the unseen devils of monotony and loneliness. This huge district of Gordonia, narrowing in to a point at Union's End, is the

largest in the Union. It runs down to the Orange River, and even then you are still in the wilderness. The closely settled, irrigated areas are within sound of train whistles; but between Upington and the sea there are hundreds of miles of river without a sign or sound of progress. South of the river there is Bushmanland, deserted by the Bushmen, strangely different from any other part of South Africa. Within living memory you travelled there on horse-back or by wagon, in a dry season, at the risk of your life. There are tracks I have followed by motor-car where I would not care to break down now.

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot.” Always that line runs in my head when I walk into the farm-houses, the diamond camps and police posts, the missions and trading stores and reed huts of these hot frontiers. I have friends in these places. Some of them have wireless sets; but I doubt very much whether the finest radio programme in the world will help a lonely human being for long. For a time, perhaps, it may relieve boredom. Switch it off, and you

click back to reality. My friends must have something more than electrical aids to sustain them.

Year after year I visualise my friends of the frontier. Seldom do they come to town, even those with motor cars. No, they are out there among the dunes on camel patrols; or looking after their sheep in country where you could hardly imagine sheep find their food; picking their oranges or ringing the Angelus in the furnace of summer; staring into the mirage, all of them; and all thinking a great deal about rain.

The years mount up to a decade, and most of them are still there. Old men, some very old, remain on and give me a welcome. I know a few who moved out, settled down in the city (so they said) and then returned to find the satisfaction they had left on the frontier. There are deep-rooted plants in the desert, and the human roots seem to go deepest of all.

I like it that way. In a changing world it is good to know that I can follow my old trails without

meeting strangers where once there were friends. What will the Orange River crossing at Goodhouse be without Carl Weidner? I will take you to Goodhouse later in this journey. And now I am thinking of the doves and date palms of Pella without Father Wolf. I must give you a memory of Pella; but on my next journey, I think, I shall take a sandy track that leaves Pella hidden behind its mountain. take I drive north to the frontier I want a timeless journey.

It is no use sitting here dreaming with my head on my hands. I want my sleeping-bag and my breakfast; and the least I can do is to keep the fire going and maintain a sharp look-out. As usual, I have no watch, and no idea how long it is since those springbok went “pronking” over the rise. But as I stretch myself, I see the headlights of a car.

I am expecting that car; I must be, this little spell alone has not bothered me at all. So I walk

across to the car in a leisurely way. No shots to attract their attention, no cry of delight. Just a long walk across the veld, for the car is further than it seems.

“Where the devil have you come from?” inquires one of my friends as I arrive.

“From that fire -over there,” I reply pleasantly. “What fire?”

I turn for the first time, and notice with something like a shudder that my fire is obscured by a ridge I have crossed.

“Surely you were looking for me,” I say. “I’ve been lost, you know,”

“We never saw your fire and we were not looking for you. “The fact is - we’re lost ourselves.”

“If I had known that I would have walked faster.”

“Bet you would. Where do we go from here?”

There follows a learned discussion on finding the way by the stars. I do not join in this, for I remember the oft repeated advice of my old schoolmaster: "If you know nothing, you say nothing." My friends, who were not all at the same school, identify various heavenly bodies, arrive at a dubious decision, and instruct the man at the wheel.

Now for the first time I am nervous. In the Kalahari, a fast car going in the wrong direction can offer more danger than a man on foot, lost but remaining in one spot. If we fail to arrive anywhere now, the situation will be highly dramatic.

The tempo mounts as we drive. I am certain my friends do not know how to find their way by the stars. I light a more thoughtful cigarette than any I smoked alone by my fire, and I jolt against the cushions as the car plunges on into the night. "What about stopping and firing some shots?" I suggest. "They may hear us in camp."

"The camp is right ahead, a long way ahead," one of our navigators replies. Nevertheless, the car halts and we peer into the darkness.

"Ha, what's that? I see a light," someone says. "That's not a light - it's the moon coming up."

But it is a light, away on the right. The car turns and drives straight into camp. We have been heading due east, away from all landmarks, into the unknown. It will be no use complimenting my friends on finding their way by the stars, for they will point out that they have brought me home. Still, I shall always be grateful to the man who thought of hanging our brightest lantern on the highest branch of the kameeldoorn tree. And also to the cook, a good Baster named Willem, who kept some of the partridges in the pot.

Now I can safely unscrew the stopper of my water-bottle and take my brandy ration. Here's to Union's End!

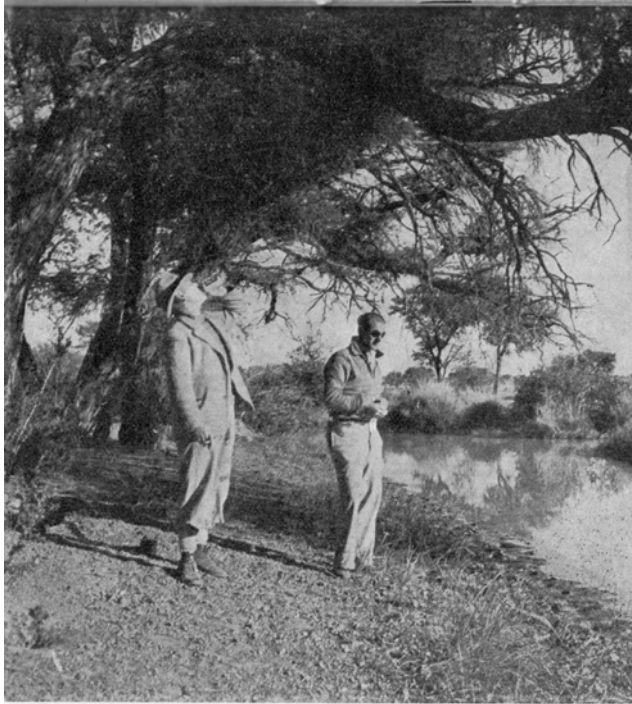
CHAPTER 2

THE FORGOTTEN OUTPOST

OUR CAMP is fifteen miles from Union's End. It is etched weirdly on the screen of memory because of something which happened the second time I camped there.

Nowadays they call it Grootkolk - the few who know it. A "kolk," of course, is a hollow in the ground which stores up water in times of rain or flood. Some water-holes are named after men who drank there long ago, for water in the Kalahari is important and memorable. This spot is simply the "Large Hollow" in the dry bed of the Nossob.

At first glance Grootkolk does not seem in any way weird. Kameeldoorn trees shade the camping spot, and though the water hollow is not much larger than a bath-tub, fringed by reeds and bushes, it is such a rare sight that it gives the whole place an air of security. Before the Union Government sank bore-holes at



The waterhole at Grootkolk in the Kalahari

Union's End and elsewhere, this was the only water in a vast area.

Knowing nothing of Grootkolk, you might have seen our camp merely as a typical Kalahari outspan. Strings of biltong, springbok and jackal skins hung up between the trees. A leather overcoat flapping in a cold breeze. Bandoliers on branches and rifles resting against tree-trunks. Blankets airing on another tree. Canvas water-bags and field-glasses dangling from other branches. Boards on petrol cases forming a table littered with brandy bottles and pickle jars.

You would have seen hunting knives and shot-gun cases, sacks of flour and sugar, tin mugs and tin plates, and a haunch of royal game on a tree-stump. The white ash of a fire that burnt well, without much smoke. A car, a van and a truck, on the first expedition, and about a dozen men sitting round on biscuit-tins.

But if you had prowled round Grootkolk searching for signs of older occupation, you

would have found them. Rusty ration tins, stamped with German words. Empty cartridge cases. Large water-tanks with holes drilled in them. Steps made from horse-shoes hammered into the trunk of the highest kameeldoorn. Lengths of field telephone wire. And finally, a relic such as only a bored soldier would leave - a flattened ration tin with the one word GEINAB punched out with a nail and fastened to a tree.

Geinab was the old Hottentot name of Grootkolk. "Tinky" Craill, our desert guide on the first trip, had never heard the name. Geinab was before his time. But in the days when the Germans were at war with the Hottentots, this place was Geinab.

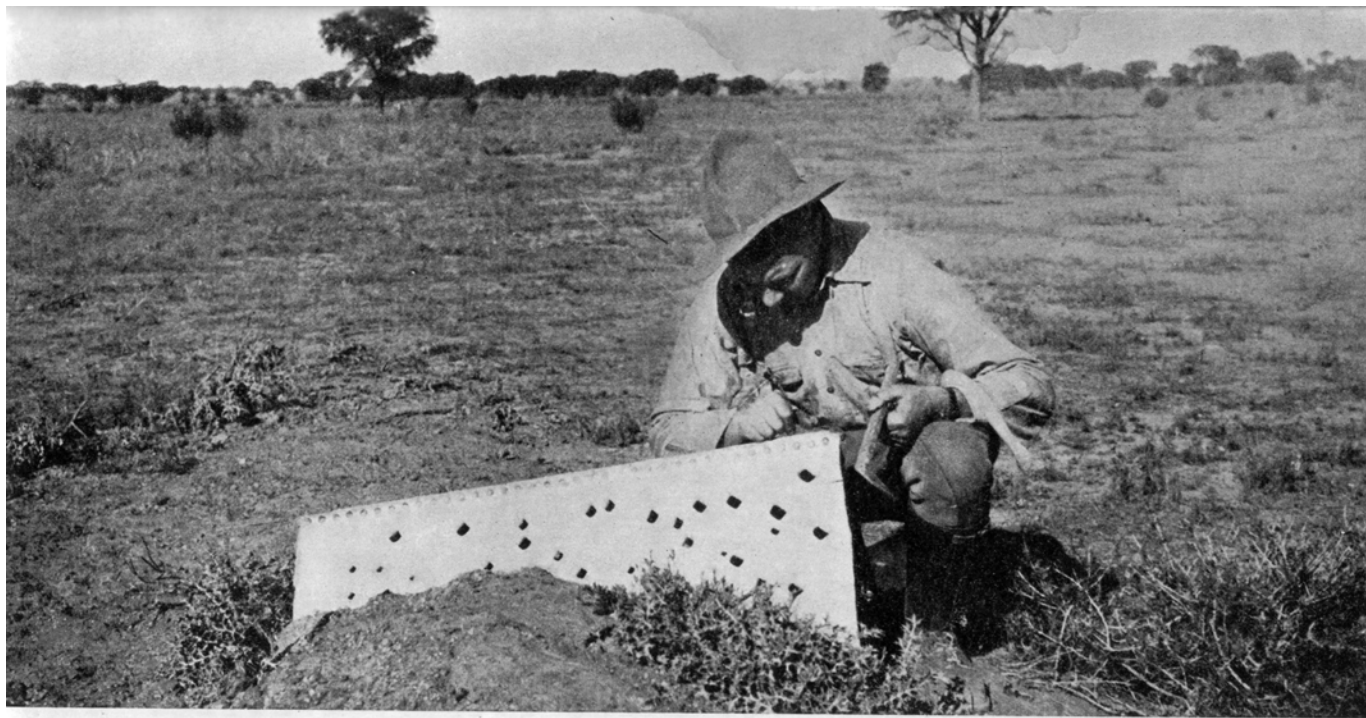
The first time I was at Geinab was in 1936, with the large party I have mentioned. Among them was a doctor who has been my companion on many journeys into the wilderness; an ear, nose and throat specialist named Jack Wicht. Jack has a younger brother whose name you have often seen in the newspapers and magazines - Hein H.

Wicht, author of short stories and travel articles. Hein is the man who made Geinab a place of sinister memory for us. He is a lean, sun-browned man who complains a great deal about the cold, and also because Jack and another brother and his only sister and several cousins are all doctors, whereas he has no title. (In the Second World War he became a sergeant, and declared that he would have his name printed in the telephone directory for ever afterwards, among all the Doctor Wichts, as Sergeant H. H. Wicht.) Between the wars, before gaining his hard-won title, Hein Wicht discovered that foreign travel was fun. From that moment he spent only brief periods at home. He circled the globe in liners and freighters, dodged off to Australia in a Swedish cargo boat and crossed over to Buenos Aires in a tiny German ship with a cargo of potatoes. Once he left at short notice for Moscow, crossed Russia by train, and was heard of again in Shanghai when he cabled for money. He brought me wine from Madeira and Chile, and from Russia he brought a neat brass plate with a red enamel inscription. This he

screwed to the gate of his home in Cape Town, and few realised that he had looted it from a door on the Russian transcontinental train, and that when translated it read: "Gentlemen."

Hein Wicht, I must tell you, is no mere snitcher of odd souvenirs. He is also a deep student of spiritualism. I gather that he still has an open mind on the subject. His library is composed equally of travel books and austere volumes on poltergeists, clairvoyance and other psychic phenomena.

In the winter of 1938, Jack Wicht and I decided once again to escape from the wet Cape winter and vanish into "the blue." We looked round for someone willing to sacrifice a good motor car in the cause of exploration, and as Hein was spending one of his rare periods at home we selected him as our victim and told him of the wonders to be seen in the Kalahari. This time, we agreed, it was to be a small expedition, just the three of us, in one well-equipped car, and no desert guide or camp servants. We had our maps and were confident that we could find the way.



Relic of the German-Hottentot war at Grootkolk in the Kalahari—a watertank pierced by bullets

Hein Wicht, good-natured as ever, had his car overhauled for the journey. He designed special water tanks to be clamped to the running-boards. Space was also found for an additional petrol tank holding forty gallons; and our food and camp kit filled the rest of the car up to the roof. Departing early one afternoon, we felt the call of the wilderness so strongly that we drove all that night through Bushmanland and ate breakfast, without regrets, in Kenhardt.

It was a smooth run into the dune country north of Upington, and Hein, the newcomer, was inclined to make light of the Kalahari. Nevertheless, we were navigating carefully by map and speedometer, and working out the distances between water-holes. The heavily-loaded car was tearing through the sand valiantly. Grootkolk (alias Geinab) was to be our camping place on the second night in the desert.

You do not follow the course of the Nossob all the way to Grootkolk, for the river wriggles across the desert and often it pays to take a

short cut over the dunes. The map showed all the river-bends clearly enough, and by watching the sun and the scenery it was possible to avoid going astray in the deadly country on either side of the river. Hein grumbled justifiably about the bushes that grew on the dunes and scratched the paintwork. Otherwise it seemed to be a successful journey.

It is fatal to stop the car in heavy sand, but at intervals, on the hard river bed, we halted and examined the oil, radiator and tyres. During one of these halts I made an alarming discovery. The bushes had not only scratched lines on the paintwork; they had torn out both the taps, and our water-tanks on the running-boards were empty.

This was a far more serious situation, I thought, than my lone, reflective wait beside the fire near Union's End two years previously. We got the maps out and made anxious calculations. This time we were not in convoy. If we broke down here, nothing would pass this way until our

friends in Cape Town sent out a search party. By that time ...

You need accurate, detailed maps in the Kalahari, and mine was a British War Office sheet. dated 1933, the scale being one in half a million. In other words, one inch equals about eight miles. On this map you will find a warning: "No permanent water in Nossob River north of Ky Ky."

Ky Ky, according to our speedometer, was thirty miles to the south, and even at Ky Ky the water was brackish. All being well, the next water would be at Grootkolk, eighty-five miles ahead. It was not permanent water, of course-only the "kolk." But we refused to believe that the "kolk" would be dry."Grootkolk or bust," we declared, and sat down in the car again full of sober determination.

The Kalahari can become a pitiless territory when something goes wrong. It finds the weak spots in motor cars, and in human beings, too. As I had discovered two years previously, the main

danger was that we might lose the river bed while. cutting one of the corners I have mentioned. That would not have been a serious matter with two large water tanks to fall back upon; but now the route had to be watched more carefully than ever. The sound we least wished to hear would be the boiling of water in the radiator.

As we drove cautiously towards Grootkolk that afternoon our conversation returned again and again to our liquid resources. I remembered that I had packed in a dozen cans of American beer. There was canned fruit as well. It was the radiator that was on our minds. One does not wish to pour beer into a radiator and regret it afterwards; but it was clear that the radiator would have to enjoy a certain priority.

There were anxious moments, racing up the dunes, when the engine faltered and knocked and the wheels showed signs of digging into the sand. At such times the remedy is to reverse and then make use of your own tracks to rush the dune again. Then, if the sand is not too deep, you

should reach the summit triumphantly. We were a silent trio during these ascents, for much depended on the steady hum of the engine.

Grootkolk, with its familiar kameeldoorn trees, came in sight at about five in the afternoon. To our intense relief there was still water in the "kolk." Now it would be possible to devise plugs for the water-tanks and fill up with muddy but life-saving water. Nevertheless, the experience had been on the fringe of something which might have developed into an ordeal. It had reminded us that you cannot take liberties with the Kalahari. In my mind were visions of men who had gone into this desert as light-heartedly as we had done; men who had been careless or simply unlucky, and who had received no second chance.

So our mood at Grootkolk that night was serious. It must have helped to build up the uncanny atmosphere which still lingers in my memory. And there was another factor. Some places in this world are so remote that, having once set eyes upon them one goes away imagining that

the first visit is bound to be the last. I never expected to see Grootkolk, and its relics of old occupation, a second time. Inevitably I visualised the crowd who had sat round under the kameeldoorn with me before. One, I remember sadly, had shot himself not long after the end of the expedition. He had been the oldest member of the party. All of us had grown beards, and I could see him again with the white stubble on his chin. I should like to think that I shall be able to set off eagerly into the Kalahari at the age of seventy-three, but I doubt it. That man was seventy-three, and he showed no signs of his age except, perhaps, in the evening when I poured out the tots of brandy. His tot was always a little larger than the others, and it gave him fresh life and appetite. I thought of that lonely old man, and his pathetic end, as we pulled our sleeping bags out of the car at Grootkolk that night.

I thought too, of all that had passed in my own life during those two years since I had last slept at Grootkolk. That is one of the reasons, I believe, why people are drawn back to distant

places where they have no real business. You get your bearings on such occasions. You remember the things that seemed so important the last time, and realise how small they really were.

Last time we set a leopard trap every night and caught only a jackal. Last time it was possible to sit beside the “kolk” with a shotgun and bring down eleven Namaqua partridges with one shot. This time the partridges stayed away. Last time the guns were always being cleaned and tested on targets near the camp. Now we had no shooting licence for this part of the desert, and we kept our rifles ready only because this was lion country. Last time practical jokes were played with the aid of “Tinky” Craill, who could imitate a lion’s roar. To-night we were in no mood for horse-play.

So I sat quietly by the red glow remembering. I had been to India since last I gazed into the fire at this remote spot. That was a journey which gave me few pleasant memories. I do not care to recall the streets of Calcutta quivering under the sun; the biting odour of curry powder spread out

on every pavement; the eternal ring, ring, ring of rupees; the sacred, slimy Ganges, the sick and deformed beggars at the Kali Ghat temple; the starving and ignorant multitude. After that, the Kalahari is clean.

Yet it was not always loathsome in India. There was a hill-top near Darjeeling, with the dawn sun leaping from range to snowy range and setting the highest points of the Himalayas ablaze. Everest flashed and vanished. It was a sunrise to remember, with Kanchenjunga dominating the scene and a Tibetan guide making coffee.

The mood at Grootkolk that night was not sombre, but certainly it was reflective. Last time we had camped here for several days. Now one night would be enough; we would drive on far into the north and turn only when we reached Angola. Life had changed and I had changed, too. In these two years Grootkolk had become a different place.

Different, that is to say from the Grootkolk of the first visit. To my way of thinking, Grootkolk had

become Geinab. Outwardly it was exactly the same. But very often you see a place through the eyes of your companions. The crowd of the first expedition had gone. Tonight three of us were sitting in an old German outpost.

Supper was over and we had dug holes for our hips. When you travel in one car there is no room for camp stretchers. It was hard to leave the fire, for the Kalahari cold was upon us again, and we knew it would be an uneasy night. So we sat looking into the flames until the fire burnt low.

“There is something about the place,” said Hein Wicht slowly. “Something queer ... I feel it.”

Then I recalled that row of books in his study, and I glanced across the fire into his face. Jack Wicht, too, was looking at his brother. But Hein remained with his faraway eyes on the fire. In the tremendous silence of the desert we heard his words and stared at him.

“Wer da!” Hein Wicht rose as he shouted, and we sprang up with him. I wished the fire was

brighter. Hein was swinging round as though there was something in the darkness. I followed his gaze, though I knew there would be nothing, but my spine was tingling like an electric bell.

Hein stood rigid for a moment, then dropped back on to his box. “What made me say that?” he asked, obviously bewildered.

“Don’t say it again,” I muttered.” I can tell you why you said it - but don’t say it again.”

“Before we go any further, I suggest we build up the camp-fire,” suggested Jack. His practical, scientific mind was at work, yet I could see he was shaken as I had been.

Though we laughed at our nerves, we took electric torches and kept together as we gathered the wood. The flames leapt up and made us feel better. Then I told them the story of Geinab. It was a story I had gathered, not without effort,. since my first visit to the place. All those military fragments had gripped my imagination, and I would not have been happy

if I had not done my utmost to piece them together.

There was no mystery about Geinab, but it was a ghastly affair. Nevertheless, we sat round our fire at Geinab and I told them all I knew, and spared them nothing.

At the end of a long and fierce campaign the last of the Hottentot bands were still fighting it out with the German patrols in the Kalahari.

It had started in 1904, with a formal declaration of war by the old Hottentot “Kaptein,” Hendrik Witbooi. The Hottentots were cunning, the Germans ruthless whenever they were able to take their revenge. One by one the Hottentot leaders surrendered or were killed ... Witbooi himself, Marengo and Morris. Only one remained, a bold and cunning leader named Simon Cooper. Driven eastwards into the dune country, Cooper fought on desperately and skilfully.

Captain Freidrich von Erskert, in charge of operations against Cooper, was killed. The guerrilla war dragged on for nearly three years. Cooper had the sympathy of many queer characters on the British side of the border. Gun-running flourished along the lawless frontier.

Finally the Germans placed small garrisons at every waterhole, and sat down patiently to wait for Simon Cooper and his men to die of thirst. Geinab was one of these outposts. The frontier with the Cape Colony had not at that time been clearly marked; the metal plates bearing the British and German coats-of-arms, erected at frequent intervals, came later. So it happened that the garrison at Geinab was about sixteen miles inside British territory. Geinab was so far from anywhere that no one knew it, or bothered about the little desert war that was being fought on the sands of the Cape Colony.

Simon Cooper did not die of thirst. He and his men lived on the t'samma melon, the wild melon which yields purer water than the “kolk”

at Geinab. They drank heartily, and then scouted round Geinab and planned an attack. Cooper decided that it would be useless to aim at the German camp in the ordinary way, for the Germans had their trenches and no seasoned soldier would expose himself once the first shot had been fired. So one night Cooper put his snipers into the high kameeldoorns. No Hottentot ever wastes a shot, and when Cooper's men opened fire at close range at daybreak the German soldiers started falling.

It was a hopeless position. The surviving Germans jumped on their horses and headed west. This was exactly what Cooper knew they would do. Cooper's mounted men barred the path and captured the survivors. They were led back to Geinab. I have no sympathy with the Germans and their "wars of extermination" in South-West Africa; but I pitied those doomed soldiers at Geinab. They should never have surrendered.

Cooper's men stripped them of their uniforms, then told them to march back naked to their

own country. The Germans marched. One can imagine them looking back over their shoulders.

As they marched, the Hottentots shot them down. No doubt some of the Germans ran, making better sport for the Hottentots. It was a war in which no quarter was given, and the survivors of the Geinab garrison were shot in the back to the last man.

That was the true story I told my friends at Geinab that night. I do not think I shall make a third journey up the Nossob. The old water-tanks are still there, below the lookout post in the Kameeldoorn tree where a German sentry once stared into the first light of his last day and challenged the Hottentots.

"Wer da!"

CHAPTER 3

LOST CITY OF THE KALAHARI

SOMEWHERE in these dunes to the east of Geinab there is a "lost city," a Zimbabwe of the Kalahari. I accompanied an expedition that searched for it in vain, but the evidence is clear. This is no mere legend. Though it has been lost for more than sixty years, the ancient ruin will be found again one day.

I have the dust-stained notebook recording our search before me. July 8th, 1936, was the day when the car and van left Geinab to penetrate the unknown desert as far as possible on this quest. The maps do not show it, but there is a dried-up seam of a river-bed which joins the Nossob eighteen miles to the south of Geinab. Someone in Upington said it was the Grootbrak River, as good a name as any other; and I should like to know whether anyone has followed it since July 8th, 1936.

The car and the van had a range of two hundred and forty miles. They carried water in drums,

and also in bottles - just in case we had to walk back. Food for a week. Members of the expedition left at the base camp signed an undertaking (in my notebook) to send out a search party in the truck if the "lost city" expedition had not returned in six days.

This time we had a compass. I have a note of all the distances and bearings; the long pan we found with a limestone outcrop; the line of sandhills there; the bends in the dry, unmapped river; the places where we cut across the dunes; the high yellow grass patches; the bitter nights we spent where no man had camped before. Sometimes the gemsbok trails looked like tracks, but all led to the holes scratched out by the beasts in search of salt.

One incident stands out, so that I do not need my old notebook. Very early in the journey we came upon a well dug in a pan. It looked dry, but no doubt a Bushman could extract a little water from the limestone. Days afterwards, following our own tracks back to the Nossob, we came upon the well again. And there, over the marks

of our boots, were the imprints of little feet. No use gazing round the landscape.

If a Bushman does not wish to be seen you will find nothing but the shape of his feet.

We decided it was a job for an aeroplane. I remembered the warning given to me by an archaeologist who had been up the Nossob before me. "When you see the country," he had written, "you will realize that one could spend months searching the sand dunes without covering a fraction of the area in which the 'lost city' may be situated." He was right. The river petered out into empty country.

The man who discovered the "lost city" was as picturesque a figure as any who travelled the Kalahari in the old days. He was an American named G. A. Farini, a cattle rancher in his own country. Farini was really searching the Kalahari for diamonds. Incredible though it may seem, Farini had met a Baster hunter named Gert Louw in America. Gert, who had some Bushman blood in him, had been taken to New York by a show-

man and put on exhibition as a freak at Coney Island. At the time Farini met him, Gert must have been homesick. Gert probably concocted the tale of diamonds, but it was enough for Farini and the Kalahari expedition was organised.

Farini was something of a showman himself. When they arrived in England on the way to the Cape he arranged for Gert Louw to be presented to Queen Victoria. I think Gert must have been the only coloured Kalahari hunter ever to shake hands with the Queen. Gert became a centenarian, but he never forgot his experiences overseas. Giving his impressions long afterwards, he said: "You could put the whole of Upington into one house in London. The people there are like locusts for multitude."

So Farini landed in Cape Town from the *Roslin Castle* on January 30th, 1885, with his son (an early photographer) and Gert Louw. They left for Kimberley three days later. There Farini equipped himself with a light spring wagon and mules. Near Upington he exchanged the mules

with a farmer for oxen; then he pushed on into the desert.

North of Kheis on the Molopo River Farini came upon a German trader, Fritz Landwehr, suffering from dysentery and hunger. Landwehr recovered and joined the expedition. He had a trick of ending every other sentence with the phrase “I’ll vatch it,” and that became his nickname.

Gert Louw recommended a Baster named Jan as camp servant. There were one or two other unnamed Basters in the party. Louw, I may add died about 1915, but Jan was still alive in November, 1933.

Before leaving Cape Town a man named D. D. Pritchard had given Farini a rough map of the Kalahari. It seems that Pritchard, an engineer, had been sent by Cecil Rhodes on a mission to Lake Ngami, and had compiled the map during the journey. With the aid of Gert Louw and the map, Farini reached the Ngami area. It was one of those rare years when the Kalahari looked like a garden; when the undulating country,

with its golden, ripening Bushman grass, resembled an English corn district; when every dune was covered with t’samma melons and eland or wildebeeste could be shot every day.

Farini diverged from the known routes, but as he wrote in his diary: “We had plenty of food for man and beast, and I trusted to my usual good luck, which never deserted me.”

On his way south from Ngami, having failed to discover the promised diamonds, Farini reached a spot called Kerses. There he found an Englishman living with a coloured wife. “He was a highly-educated man, of good family, and his conversation made me wonder how he could consent to live in this out-of-the-way corner of the world,” remarked Farini. “I suppress his name at his personal request.”

Farini visited the Baster settlement of Mier (now known as Rietfontein) and then struck eastwards again. He followed the dry Nossob river past the junction with the equally dry Aoub, went an northwards along the Nossob

and three days later reached the Ky Ky mountains. All these landmarks are of vital importance if you intend setting out in search of the “lost city.”

At Ky Ky he left the Nossob and turned to the east across the sand. Four more days brought him to the edge of the K’gung forest. Here he hunted and also collected butterflies and insects. It is clear that Farini and his son enjoyed themselves in the desert. Only when the rice ran short did they turn south again for Upington. On the second day they sighted a high mountain which the guide Jan identified as Ky Ky. On reaching the foot of it, however, it turned out to be a mountain that nobody in the party had seen or heard of before.

Now comes the dramatic discovery. Farini wrote:

“We camped near the foot of it, beside a long line of stone which looked like the Chinese wall after an earthquake, and which on examination proved to be the ruins of quite an extensive

structure, in some places buried beneath the sand, but in others fully exposed to view. We traced the remains far nearly a mile, mostly a heap of huge stones, but all flat sided, and here and there with the cement perfect and plainly visible between the layers. The top row of stones were worn away by the weather and the drifting sands, some of the uppermost ones curiously rubbed on the underside and standing out like a centre-table on one short leg.

“The general outline of this wall was in the form of an arc, inside which lay at intervals of about forty feet apart a series of heaps of masonry in the shape of an oval or an obtuse ellipse, about a foot and a half deep, and with a flat bottom, but hollowed out at the sides for about a foot from the edge. Some of these heaps were cut out of solid rock, others were formed of more than one piece of stone, fitted together very accurately. As they were all more or less buried beneath the sand, we made the men help to uncover the largest of them with the shovels - a kind of work they did not much

like - and found that where the sand had protected the joints they were quite perfect. This took nearly all one day, greatly to Jan's disgust: he could not understand wasting time uncovering old stones; to him it was labour thrown away. I told him that here must have been either a city or a place of worship, or the burial-ground of a great nation, perhaps thousands of years ago.

"On digging down nearly in the middle of the arc, we came upon a pavement about twenty feet wide, made of large stones. The outer stones were long ones, and lay at right angles to the inner ones. This pavement was intersected by another similar one at right angles, forming a Maltese cross, in the centre of which at some time must have stood an altar, column, or some sort of monument, for the base was quite distinct, composed of loose pieces of fluted masonry. Having searched for hieroglyphics or inscriptions, and finding none, my son took several photographs and sketches, from which I must leave others more learned

on the subject than I to judge as to when and by whom this place was occupied."

Three days after leaving the ruins, travelling all the way over a gentle slope, Farini came again to the real Ky Ky mountain.

That was the first and last detailed description of the "last city" ever written. It appeared in Farini's book *Through the Kalahari Desert*, published in London in 1886. In the same year Farini read a paper before the Royal Geographical Society in London. There is not a scrap of evidence to suggest that he was a charlatan. Some of his humour will strike the modern reader as facetious; but his narrative has been tested in many ways and found to be entirely accurate. His son made sketches as well as photographs, and the sketches of known places and Bushman paintings are authentic.

To sum up there was no possible reason why Farini should have invented a "lost city" or why his son should have drawn on his imagination while sketching it. Even without it, the book was

an admirable tale of travel. Farini did not work up to the “lost city” as a climax, as a fiction writer might have been tempted to do. He described it casually, like many other scenes on his journey. I am convinced that Farini wrote only of what he saw, and that he did indeed set eyes upon the “Chinese wall” and also the fluted masonry and other relics of which he wrote.

In his lecture to the Royal Geographical Society, Farini stated that the position of the “lost city” was latitude $23\frac{1}{2}$ degrees south, longitude $21\frac{1}{2}$ east. These definite figures were no doubt given in good faith; but the map he used has since been proved to have been inaccurate. This is not surprising, for a comparison of the most modern maps of this little-known area reveal a number of discrepancies and omissions. Careful estimates have proved that Farini was as much as seventy miles out in his north and south distances, and at least forty miles in those running from east to west.

Farini, however, left other clues to the position of the “lost city.” He said that he travelled from

twenty to thirty miles a day in his wagon; so that his positions may be plotted from the known landmarks he mentioned, in much the same way as a master mariner (without modern aids) works out his position in foggy weather by dead reckoning. Farini also recorded that the ruins lay about thirty or thirty-five miles up a fairly long tributary of the Nossob. This tributary, he added, ran down almost directly from the north to its junction with the Nossob - a valuable piece of information if only one had an air survey map of the area to study. The Nossob was far removed from the 1939-1945 war zone, and no air photography was done there during that period.

You may well ask whether a great hush has rested over this strange discovery ever since Farini’s day, or whether there have been rumours of the ruins since then.

Of course there have been rumours. In the lonely Ghanzi settlement in Bechuanaland I met

farmers who had heard of the ruins from natives - stories of heaped stones where, the natives declared, people had lived long ago. Scotty Smith, the Kalahari freebooter, who will appear again later in this narrative, often spoke of having visited the ruins.

Probably the most valuable recent evidence came from a young Gordonia farmer named Nikolaas Coetzee. In 1933 Coetzee told Dr. W. Meent Borchers¹ of Upington that some years previously, while hunting to the east of the Nossob, he had seen an arrangement of stones similar to that described by Farini. Coetzee was in a hurry at the time; he was no archaeologist, and he had not stopped to examine the place. In fact, he had only a rough idea of the locality. Nevertheless, it is clear that Coetzee (who had no motive for romancing) saw something unusual.

The most scientific attempt to discover the “lost city” was made in the winter of 1933 by

Mr. F. R. Paver, a reliable amateur archaeologist of Johannesburg. Mr. Paver studied Farini’s book and lecture thoroughly, tested the evidence at every possible point, weighed up all the other evidence I have mentioned, and then planned a preliminary survey with the idea of discovering whether Farini’s story could be fitted into the geographical facts.

Mr. Paver set out from Upington with Dr. Borchers, who had known Scotty Smith and all the other famous desert characters intimately. They received assistance from the police, and were taken to Jan Abrahams, the same hunter who had accompanied Farini. Old Jan remembered the trek well; but his evidence on the ruins was inconclusive. You may remember that Farini mentioned that Jan showed no interest in the ruins. Nearly half a century later that was still Jan’s attitude. He recalled the hunting, but not the heaps of stones.

Travelling northwards with a light car and a truck, Mr. Paver picked up Nikolaas Coetzee

¹ Dr. Borchers died in June, 1948, at the age of 81

and then a desert trader named Jooste. The party also had a Hottentot guide who had often been on trapping expeditions to the east of the Nossob. Well equipped and informed in every way, Mr. Paver headed boldly into Farini's country.

He chose for this reconnaissance the middle one of three Nossob tributaries. This appeared to be a dry river called, on an old German map, the Molentswane; though he could find no trace of it in the London Times atlas or even on the 1933 official map of Bechuana-land, which has a scale of eight miles to one inch. Nevertheless, the tributary was there and they followed it, running into heavy sand and using a gallon of petrol to cover seven miles. During the whole of the first day they covered only thirty miles. I can sympathise with them, for I once spent a day (from nine in the morning until eleven at night) when the speedometer registered fifty miles; one of those days it is as well to think about when you are preparing for a Kalahari expedition. The sort of day when you

may wonder why you did not bring tools instead of toys.

Mr. Paver and his party lost all trace of the tributary on the first day. On the second, the Hottentot guide admitted that he had never gone any further. They passed one spot shown on the map, the only feature marked in an area of two thousand square miles. This was Dimpo Pan, in reality a series of connected pans. And finally they came to the edge of the dune country and looked out over a plain. They returned to the Nossob by a different route, studying the limestone formations they encountered and forming the impression that an intelligent observer such as Farini could not have been deceived by natural rock.

I wrote to Mr. Paver before my own search, and he replied: "To me it is certain from Farini's account that the locality he mentioned was somewhere within sixty miles of the Nossob river, probably on about twenty-five degrees south latitude." Then he added the words I have already quoted. "That is very vague, and when

you see the country you will realize that one could spend months searching the sand-dunes without covering a fraction of the area in which the 'lost city' may be situated."

In June, 1947, I was in Upington again, and I had a long talk to Dr. Borchers on the subject of the "lost city." I found the aged doctor as keenly interested as ever in the ruins.

"Recently I met two men who declared they had been to the 'lost city'," Dr. Borchers told me. "I cannot give you their names, for they are farmers who crossed the Bechuanaland border to poach game. For that reason they did not announce their discovery. But I questioned them carefully, and I can tell you that their description tallies exactly with the details given in Farini's book."

Dr. Borchers also provided me with an entirely new sidelight on the mystery. A police sergeant, he said, had told him that many years ago, while patrolling on camel-back, he had come to an

ancient stone-quarry in the desert. Some of the stones had been squared on the spot, and were still to be seen there. It was in the "lost city" area. And deep in the sand the sergeant had discovered the remains of what appeared to be a boat, fourteen feet in length.

"I am too old now for desert exploration," said Dr. Borchers regretfully. "But I am sure there was, a settlement, as Farini described it, centuries ago in the Kalahari. We know that rivers once came south from Lake Ngami through the desert to join the Orange. The people of the settlement must have had water, and now it seems that they had river transport. To my mind, the discovery of the boat is conclusive evidence. I feel that I was fairly near the place myself. It cannot be long before the dunes give up their secret."

CHAPTER 4

UNKNOWN GAME RESERVE

“KALAHARI GEMSBOK NATIONAL PARK.” The notice board stands in one of the loneliest spots in South Africa, and it marks a game reserve that has been kept almost secret ever since it was proclaimed in 1931. It now covers more than a million morgen, a larger area than the Kruger National Park.

A few years hence, perhaps, some of the hundreds of thousands of people who know the Kruger Park will have travelled into the desert to see a different wonderland of game. At present I cannot recommend the journey to everyone.

Without a guide, a trip to the Kalahari National Park might end in disaster. Day after day a party of motorists might await rescue after a breakdown while their water supply gradually failed. The resourceful, careful, well-equipped motorist has nothing to fear. “When you get to the Kalahari you know what you can do,” someone on the desert fringe told me. This

unknown game reserve is still the Kalahari, an uncomfortable place to be stranded. And now, if you have not been discouraged by this warning, I will tell you how to reach it.

Upington on the Orange River is the gateway to the Kalahari, and from Upington there runs an incredible switchback road over hundreds of sand dunes. Follow it for two hundred miles and you will reach the southern tip of the reserve, where the Auob and Nossob rivers meet. These dusty rivers flow only once or twice in a century, forming rough highways through the Kalahari for the rest of the period.

On the west there is the dry Auob marking part of the reserve’s western boundary, until it crosses the 20th parallel of longitude that cuts through Union’s End. A queer arrangement, difficult to understand until you have seen the Kalahari Park or a good map.

Within this reserve, among the kameeldoorn trees, on the pans and over the dunes, many thousands of gemsbok feed on the desert melons.

The gemsbok population, I believe is now officially estimated at about 100,000 head, while 70,000 springbok, 60,000 wildebeeste, 10,000 ostriches and about 300 lions vary the thirsty landscape. The eland which appeared to be in danger of extinction is finding a new lease of life there. Smaller buck are plentiful. Every living creature is protected by the law of the reserve. "You cannot even shoot a jackal," an old hunter told me regretfully.

These gemsbok are worth preserving. You cannot see them in the Kruger Park - only in the dry territories do they flourish. Once they were plentiful on the banks of the Orange River. Ruthless hunters drove them north, so that now they rove in large herds in this inaccessible corner. Large and strong as horses, they are, with their white blazed faces, warm grey colouring and dark markings. Their horns are like spears. When you see a head lifted so that only one horn is outlined against the sky, it is easy to trace the origin of the unicorn legend.

An airman passing over the reserve would notice the dunes all criss-crossed with narrow trails. These are the gemsbok paths, leading to favourite salt-licks, to places where many sharp hoofs have scratched out roots and moist bulbs and left the veld pock-marked. Some declare that the gemsbok never seek pools of water. I think it would be more correct to say that the gemsbok can exist for long periods in the desert without drinking. Moisture is obtained from the vegetation and stored up in the paunch. There is no doubt that the gemsbok possesses the power to survive in droughts that cause havoc among the rest of the game. A brown root called "eland wortel" sustains life in the gemsbok. During a dry season the wildebeeste may be observed following the more resourceful gemsbok in search of this root.

Men dying of thirst have saved their lives by shooting a gemsbok and securing as much as three gallons of ill-flavoured fluid. I tasted gemsbok milk on one occasion and hoped that I

should never be driven to the more desperate substitute.

After the gemsbok and springbok, I think the lordly kudu ranks high among the antelope of the reserve. The kudu is well camouflaged, and for that reason it has lingered in areas where other buck have been shot out. Many kudu find nourishment in the Kalahari grass; you often see the spiral horns of the males along the Auob and Nossob. Beware of kudu at the gallop in the neighbourhood of your car, for they have a way of leaping over the bonnet. When a kudu misjudges the distance, the car crumples under the shock.

Several boreholes have been drilled along the rivers by the Government to provide water for man and game. Side trips into the waterless interior of the reserve are not encouraged by the authorities, though a track of sorts crosses the northern portion. Water must never be forgotten by the traveller. There is one stretch of more than a hundred miles of the Nossob route where only a muddy pool may be found. Somewhere in this

territory, I was told, there was a poisonous water-hole bearing a warning sign, a relic of days when men staggered up to the spat with parched throats. "If you drink, you die," read the notice scrawled on a board. "If you do not drink, you die. So drink."

The Auob (pronounced "0-hoop") is the track favoured by the Government. There boreholes and windmills are more frequently encountered. The Nossob has a notice board at each end stating that the route is closed – "trespassers will be prosecuted." For years the prohibition was ignored and motorists passed freely. Now the sanctuary is well guarded.

Those who go lion hunting with cameras will never find in this Kalahari reserve the pictures they secure with ease in the Kruger National Park. When the traveller Anderson trekked up the Molopo in the 'eighties of last century he wrote: "This is truly the lion veld; I have counted at one time in a troop, great and small, twenty-two, frequently six and seven in the middle of the day, and within a short distance of my

wagons.” Now a spoor on the dunes is all most visitors will see of the lions that once made it dangerous for a man to leave his wagon without a rifle in his hand.

Nevertheless, the cattle farming areas to the south and east of the game reserve still offer opportunities, and I knew a man who made a living by conducting parties of lion hunters into the desert. Frikkie McDonald was his name, and once he brought a pair of lion cubs back alive from one of his expeditions.

These small bundles of brown fluff have the strength of dogs. They rolled on their backs, playing like kittens. I wanted to stroke them. “Look out!” warned McDonald. “They bite!”

While the cubs called to each other in the language of the desert, McDonald told me their story. “I was out in my old hunting ground, motoring along the Nossob when I saw the whole family,” he said. “Now a lion and lioness with cubs mean risky business - even for a professional hunter trying to earn a living in

these hard times. I would rather face a hungry lion. I kept the engine of the car running, fixed my sights, and got the lioness. The lion came for me. Two shots went home, but in the wrong spot. They stopped him for a moment, though, and he crouched there glaring at me and swinging his tail like an angry cat. That was my chance. I gave him the deadly frontal shot between the eyes - my favourite shot. You don’t always get a chance like that. Sometimes, when a lion comes springing towards you, the only thing to do is to aim for the larger target presented by the hind quarters and cripple him. Then you have time to finish the job.

“But I got this one - I am all right till next time. And there were the cubs, only a few days old, and ready to lick the hand which had killed their parents. I brought them back to Upington and gave them milk in feeding bottles. They are two months old now and thriving on it.

“One day, if I keep them too long, they will have their revenge. Of course I shall sell them. If I am lucky, a zoo will pay me £100 for them. If not,

I'll have to take £10 from some woman who fancies them as novel pets. But they will have to go to a zoo in the end."

McDonald used to shoot dozens of lions in the Kalahari every year, sending the skins to the markets of Europe. If you wish to shoot a lion he will take you out into the desert, stand behind you with rifle ready, and save your life if you miss.

"No good shooting the mangy ones - and you want a good rifle," says McDonald solemnly. "Some tell of charging elephants, of buffalo and rhino; but I would rather face any of them than a wounded lion."

He took one party of amateur hunters into the desert and one afternoon they drove off in an open motor car without him to see what they could find." A pretty tale they told when they came in at sundown, shouting far whisky," grumbled McDonald. "They shot at a lion from the car and wounded it. The lion came jumping towards them, and no one had the nerve to fire

again. They simply drove away. But before they got the car moving fast, the lion sprang on to the spare tyre at the back and clung to it. There it was, roaring and biting the car and hood. A fine sight it must have been - the open car flying across the desert, four men in the front seat trying to shake off a wounded lion. A scene for a comic film all right. Well, the lion fell off at last and sat down in the road, puzzled. Then they slowed up and shot it; but they kept the engine running, just in case of accidents.

"Yes, it's not a game for a nervous man - taking folks lion hunting when they've never shot anything larger than a partridge before. They have every chance of scoring a hit, for the lion is standing still when they fire. But I have to cover them. I am the man who fires at a furious moving target. Well, I have not missed yet."

You would have to camp for weeks in the game reserve to glimpse all the animals belonging to

this part of the Kalahari. But if you waited long enough you would probably see that rare eagle, the lammergeier - the almost extinct cousin of the common lammervanger.

Lammergeiers nest in the heights of the Karasburg mountains, and range eastwards to the Kalahari in search of meat. You can identify the lammergeier by the “beard” of long black bristles under the chin. These are the huge eagles round which legends have grown up; the eagles that are said to carry off babes, and which certainly prey upon small antelopes.

Both the gom paauw and the smaller duin paauw feed on the gum from the kameeldoorn trees in the reserve. The gom paauw is the largest of all the bustards, a giant among game birds, some weighing more than fifty pounds. The flesh is the most appetising of its kind; but the paauw is nowhere plentiful and there are few places left where it may be shot legally.



Paauw, largest of game-birds, shot in the Kalahari

Incidentally the paauw is not an easy bird to kill. I have seen one walk off with a rifle bullet in its body. If you bring down a paauw from any height and it falls on rocks, sheer weight causes it to break up, and you can only gather the fragments.

The ratel, or honey badger, is at home in the game reserve. It does not confine its diet to honey, however, but preys on small buck. This is a tough customer with powerful claws. You will be lucky to spot one in the day-time.

Then there is the grey-coloured bush pig with ferocious tusks and a mild manner - interesting because it has been exterminated in settled districts and survives only where shooting is prohibited. They eat roots and berries, eggs and birds, becoming aggressive only when cornered. That freak of the veld, the aardvark, also finds life easy in these parts. It is a champion tunneller, living on ants and termites.

Among the smaller beasts of prey are three species of wildcat, the gouskat, tierkat and most

daring of all the rooikat or African lynx. It will even tackle a fully-grown springbok or young kudu. With its tufted ears, sturdy lines and amber eyes, it is also the most handsome of the wildcats. Thinned out by poison in farming areas, this is the lynx's stronghold. Sometimes it is found in hollow trees; usually the kittens are reared in burrows. A lynx is hard to tame, but I remember one in the Windhoek zoo which could be stroked with fair safety. They are more plentiful in the reserve than leopards, and rival the leopards as killers.

The wild dog is the lynx's great enemy, and the lynx has to find a tree quickly when the wild dog packs are in pursuit.

I saw a pack of wild dogs along the Nossob. They were not pretty creatures, with their coarse hair of sandy yellow and the irregular brown and black markings. "Lycaon pictus," the naturalist calls them; and they are also known as "wilde honde," hyaena dogs and hunting dogs. You can tell them at once by their ears, large and rounded; and by their trick of jumping up and

remaining for a time on their hind legs, to watch anything that arouses their curiosity.

A fatal trick, for three of us leaped out of the car, tore the covers from our rifles, and emptied the magazines into the pack. One dog fell. The rest, true to type, dashed away for a hundred yards and stopped again, jumping inquisitively to see what was making all the noise. Then they were away out of range, running at a speed which left no doubt of their ability to overtake the swiftest of the game animals.

I examined the fallen dog. The teeth were impressive; far stranger than those of other dogs. It had a pointed muzzle, and a head not unlike that of a hyaena; but the body was more shapely and suggested speed. I counted the toes - four, not only on the hind-feet, but on the fore-feet as well. Thus the distinctive spoor may be recognised, different from all the rest of the dog tribe. There is probably only one species of wild dog in Africa, though the southern packs are lighter in colour and larger. Old specimens may be almost black.

Everywhere they hunt in well-organised packs, leaders to right and left of the victim, keeping close by sight; the others racing behind by the scent. Nothing will cause them to abandon the chase. You may shoot at the dogs in pursuit of a buck; but they run on, tearing at the flanks while running. A pack will eat a small antelope in a few minutes.

Natives have told me that wild dogs show little fear of lions, and that a large pack will attack a lion. (Packs vary from five to fifty, or even a hundred.) I do not think a battle between wild dogs and lion has ever been recorded, though it is known that the dogs will tackle a leopard. Even the strong wildebeeste do not treat the wild dogs lightly; they form a circle with the calves inside. Animals that will not flee from a lion will stampede madly when wild dogs appear.

One habit of the dogs enrages all hunters and travellers who have seen it. The dogs are so voracious that they often eat their victims alive. They are cannibals, too, biting their own wounded. And when game is plentiful they

always kill more than they need to satisfy their terrible meat-hunger. The lion will return to a kill. The hyaena is a timid scavenger, prowling after scraps. Wild dogs kill and pass on to kill again and again.

I have not been able to find any record of wild dogs killing human beings. Bushmen in the Kalahari are not afraid of the dogs. Nevertheless, a man who showed fear in the presence of a hungry pack might be torn to pieces.

You can hear them howling and chattering at night - sinister sounds. When they are scouring the veld in huge circles after game their rallying cries are softer, a sort of "coo-whoop." Occasionally you will find a litter of puppies in an ant-bear hole. But wild dogs caught in this way are seldom kept as pets. A lion cub is more friendly-and less treacherous. If you meet wild dogs, shoot without mercy. Spare my lord the lion if you will, and let the cunning leopard slink away. But once you have seen the villainy of the wild dog, you will shoot until your rifle barrel is hot.

Even in game sanctuaries the wild dog is treated as an outlaw, shot at sight. It is more fierce and destructive than the coyote of America, the Australian dingo, or any hyaena or jackal on the African veld. Where packs of wild dogs flourish, small antelope and much other game will vanish. Wild dogs are wasteful, determined killers, creating terror wherever they roam.

When I first travelled up the Nossob, the Kalahari Park was a poacher's paradise. The Nossob boundary marched with the Bechuanaland frontier - and licences to shoot in Bechuanaland were freely granted. Thus a few yards in the middle of the dry river bed made all the difference between lawful hunting and criminal poaching.

There were farms, too, bordering the Auob. Bore-holes had been sunk along this route in 1914, to make possible the invasion of German South-West Africa from the Kalahari. Some of

the men guarding the bore-holes remained on after the war as farmers. They were, in fact, the most northerly farmers in the Cape Province; and they had to be compensated and moved when the reserve was proclaimed.

No white farmers ever settled along the Nossob, but there were the Basters, the coloured communities living mainly by hunting. It was absurd having these people on the edge of a game reserve. Their villages were just over the border in Bechuanaland; but there was no doubt about where they hunted when the game warden's back was turned.

This problem was solved in 1938, when the British Government granted the National Parks Board a strip of land 170 miles long on the Nossob. In return, the Union Government compensated the Basters. I met the Basters trekking away from their villages in 1938, and I shall take you now on a visit to these queer people.

Their exodus from the Nossob meant that one of the famous old hunting areas had been closed at last. Every living creature from the gemsbok down to the hare is safe within the enormous boundaries of the Kalahari National Park.

CHAPTER 5

HALF-CASTES AND PIONEERS

AMONG THE PIONEERS of the hot Kalahari frontiers was this race whose descendants still call themselves Basters with pride. The first meaning of the Afrikaans word "baster" is bastard; but there is an alternative translation - half-caste. These people are half-castes.

Most of the so-called Baster race are now firmly settled in the "republic" of Rehoboth, whither they trekker before the Germans came to South-West Africa. But there are other small colonies in remote corners, and in 1936 I met groups of these mixed people living on the Nossob.

Titus Matthys, one of the many remarkable characters the race has produced, is their headman. I asked Titus to describe himself. "Ek

is ‘n opregte Baster,” he replied firmly. “I am a genuine bastard.”

In the days when there were no colour problems, a white farmer who married a coloured woman received a grant of land along the Orange River with his bride. Many an adventurer helped to keep the European strain alive in a people who had mingled with Hottentot, Koranna and Griqua, and yet formed a distinctive racial type of their own.

For generations they have clung pathetically to their white ancestry; and, as a community, have discouraged marriages with Hottentots and darker people. Incidentally, the harsh name which they themselves selected does them an injustice. They have long been under missionary influence, and even the unfortunate unions of white and coloured of the early days were, as a rule, legal marriages.

The men still rely on their rifles as a means of livelihood. When I met Titus Matthys in 1936, he had shot fifty-one lions and eighty-four

leopards, each skin representing from £3 to £5 at the trader’s store, besides a number of scars on his body. No doubt he has added to his score since then. Once he found a pair of young lion cubs and was carrying them off when the lioness appeared. He escaped by an old Bushman trick. First he threw down the sack of t’samma melons he had been collecting. The lioness stopped to sniff the sack and then Titus set fire to the grass.

Once he was riding beneath a kameeldoorn tree when a leopard sprang on him from the branches. “I jumped off and shot it,” Titus Matthys told me, fingering a scar on his neck. The Basters are not an imaginative race. Titus is still ready to ride fifty miles when news of a leopard spoor reaches him. He married a daughter of the Vilander family and has twenty-eight children of his own. Others may trap the jackal or hunt the harmless kloosie with dogs; but Titus, with so many to maintain, seeks fiercer animals. This brown man with sunken cheeks, wide-brimmed hat, old clothes

and velskoens knows more of the desert than most explorers and naturalists have written.

One night in camp, when Titus had come over in quest of a glass of brandy, I turned on the radio receiver. He had heard it before, but after the music there came a voice from Cape Town speaking in Afrikaans. Titus was dumb-founded. He stared at the bright dial, uttered a weird high-pitched laugh and rolled on the ground. "Now that is something I can understand," he gasped at last. For the rest of the Afrikaans programme he remained on his haunches listening intently.

The Basters of the Kalahari have one of the finest hunting grounds in the world at their back-doors. In the wind-blown dunes varying in colour from cream to vermilion red, roam the gemsbok, the springbok, the wild ostrich and much other game for the pot. Cattle owned by the Basters grow fat on the t'samma melons that ripen on the sandy ridges. The Basters have free meat and milk, and their skill as hunters enables them to exchange karosses for

occasional luxuries in the shape of tinned foods. They will have to kill more of their own goats in future, however, for the Bechuanaland Government has placed restrictions on gemsbok and springbok hunting. Vegetables, or even roots, form no part of their diet, and fruit is unknown. Meat is shared in the village, not sold, by these primitive socialists.

During their hunting expeditions into "the sand" (as they call the desert), the Basters have dealings with wild Bushmen and uncivilised Hottentots. Titus Matthys trades with the Bushmen - a stick of tobacco for a skin. He is in the position of a middleman exploiting the Stone Age. The Bushmen, he says, take their families with them when they rove the unmapped desert to the east of the Nossob. Hottentot hunters travel alone, returning to villages where their wives await them.

A scientist who visited the Basters found one man making velskoens. His outfit included a last and shoe blocks from Europe; but he was using the red fibre roots of the primitive

Bushman for the tanning. It was a strange blend of ancient and modern methods.

All the Baster hunters carry a queer antidote for snake-bite, Bushman arrow poison or ordinary blood poisoning. It is a dried lizard of a rare species, known to them as the N'auboo. Light yellow in colour, the lizard is about seven inches in length. This remedy is applied in the form of powder, and is sprinkled into incisions made near the spat where the poison entered the victim's body.

The N'auboo, according to the Basters, is fast and difficult to catch. It is such valuable medicine, however, that a Baster will part with an ox rather than go out into the veld without the remedy. The Basters declare it has never been known to fail. As far as I know, the N'auboo has never been examined in a laboratory.

I learnt more of the ways of the Basters from Willem, one of the Titus Matthys clan, who joined my expedition as camp servant. Willem was a lean, muscular little fellow, who appeared

to be able to stand any hardship until he found there was a doctor in the party. Then he developed a daily stomach-ache or rheumatism, and showed keen enjoyment in swallowing Jack Wicht's medicine.

As a rule the Basters are without medical aid. Three or four visits a year by a Government medical officer are all they can expect, and the people are so scattered that the doctor cannot reach them all. If an urgent operation is necessary, the patient usually dies. Far lesser complaints, those famous South African remedies known as "Old Dutch Medicines" are used with the faith that works miracles.

As a tracker Willem never faltered. In his own country, he said, he recognised the shapes and colours of the dunes; he could find the way through long stretches of desert as easily as though the dunes were sign-posts. But he admitted the Hottentots possessed a far more acute sense of direction. They could walk through unfamiliar country without even looking at the sky. As for the Bushmen, they were never

lost and they never died of thirst. Willem said that he could go two days without water - after that he was finished.

When we spent a day shooting Willem always shook his head and deplored the waste of cartridges. In the land of the Basters ammunition is carefully hoarded. One cartridge means one dead buck. I found that Willem was a poor judge of distances beyond about seventy-five yards. He had always stalked his game, and it had never occurred to him to risk a long shot and a miss. His philosophy about lions, I gathered was that if a man was intended to be taken he would be taken. Nevertheless, it was a good thing to keep a loaded rifle handy "so that a man might help himself."

Willem slept in his patched clothes with a blanket beneath him and a thin kaross on top. On nights when our water bottles tinkled with ice I would wake up half-frozen in my thick sleeping bag and see him crouched over the fire, chewing tobacco, and thinking no doubt, of his distant hut at Ky Ky and the stories of travel he would tell

an his return. A good, willing Baster was Willem.

When I first met the Basters their main settlement was at Ky Ky, a village of hartbeeshuisies on the Nossob. They had two wells, one among the huts and the other in the river bed. Sometimes the village well dried up. Then water for the whole community and the cattle had to be drawn by the women, bucket after bucket, with never a break, day or night, from the remaining source of water. It was a meagre supply, but the underground stream never failed. There is no more water for many miles up or down the river. Bushmen, of course, can rely entirely on the t'samma; but the Basters need water and have become clever diviners and diggers of wells. They go down to 150 feet, lowering a man with the aid of strips of leather cut from a gemsbok hide.

During a second journey in 1938 I was approaching the junction of the Auob and Nossob (known as Twee Rivieren) when I saw scores of fires blazing in the darkness. At first I

thought the veld was on fire. Then I observed people and cattle round the flames.

The whole Baster community, nearly three hundred men, women and children, were trekking out of settlements where they had lived since the beginning of the century. This was their last night on the Nossob, their old hunting ground, and they were on their way to live in a new area along the Molapo. As I watched them beside their wagons, I felt like an eye-witness of one of those picturesque, minor episodes of history which go unrecorded. The Kalahari game reserve had expanded, and wisely the authorities were moving the meat-hungry Basters out of it.

The man who brought the Basters into the Kalahari was an outstanding character named Dirk Vilander. His father was a white man, his mother had been a slave at the Cape.

At one time Vilander and his followers settled at Louriesfontein, on the edge of Bushmanland.

Hunters from this little community travelled far to the north of the Orange River, and brought back word of a Kalahari oasis. At this period the unfortunate Basters were feeling the inevitable pressure of white farmers who coveted their land; so in 1865 Vilander led them into the Kalahari. They called their new republic Mier, because when they arrived in the territory, Vilander found water in an ant-bear's hole, and had to pick out the ants before he could drink. The capital of the republic was Rietfontein (200 miles from Upington), where there was a strong fountain and a large pool fringed with reeds.

Very soon the Basters had to fight for the country they had found. Afrikaner, the Hottentot chief at Warmbad, regarded this part of the Kalahari as his hunting ground; he ordered the Basters to leave, and when they refused he attacked them. Vilander routed the Hottentots, for he was well-armed. Not long afterwards the Korana chiefs Klaas Lucas and Pofadder threatened the coloured republic; but by this time Vilander was firmly established and lived on at

Rietfontein by right of conquest. He secured recognition from the Cape Government, which approved of this civilised settlement on the frontier that was so often disturbed.

Vilander's republic was composed at first of a dozen families. He had no written legal code, but administered the law as he and his advisers remembered it in the Cape Colony. As the republic grew, Vilander nominated a Raad with veld-cornets to assist him. Vilander applied to the Cape Government for protection, but all he received was a grant of £25 a year for ammunition.

Burghers of the coloured republic paid annual tribute to Vilander. Water, pasturage and hunting were free and open to all; it was a socialistic, state, fairly prosperous, in a land which the Cape Government still regarded as a worthless desert beyond its jurisdiction. White traders visited Vilander with ammunition, coffee, sugar, brandy, tobacco and clothing; and loaded their wagons with game biltong, hides, horns and ostrich feathers.

Vilander's capital had become a tidy village of about twenty-five houses, some built of red brick, in 1871. White visitors saw Vilander trying prisoners at his magistrate's court. There were about a hundred Basters in the republic, with Hottentot and Bushmen servants.

One of these visitors has left a description of Vilander: "He is a tall, well-built, dark-brown mulatto with large, handsome eyes which twinkled as he spoke, his face bearing a perpetual smile, the parted lips displaying white, even teeth; but with a cunning expression underlying his good looks."

Vilander, said this visitor, wore corduroy trousers, silver and brass rings and velskoens. His house of stone and thatch was furnished with blue-painted wagon boxes and wooden bedsteads covered with stiff bullock hides. On the cow-dung floor lay a heap of springbok skins. There were children and goats in the house, and fowls perched on the rafters. The women blackened their faces with a mixture of

powder and grease; some went barefooted, but others had skirts, shoes and bonnets.

At this time Vilander had adopted the title of "Chief of the Emigrant Basters." He had a white man as private secretary, a lanky person named Halliburton, with an unsteady eye and a general appearance which did not inspire the visitor with confidence. Halliburton had a Baster wife and family, and wrote on behalf of Vilander to the Cape Government. "He could write well and talk like a book," recorded the visitor, "but he had 'African fever' and his garden was dying for lack of water."

It appears from the visitor's account that the Basters were not all as energetic as Vilander. They smoked, drank coffee, ate and talked a lot; but they allowed their cattle to grow thin rather than cut and store grass. Fortunes were being made in the trade in wild ostrich feathers at this time. The price went up to £70 a pound, but the Basters preferred "Cape smoke" to more useful articles. There was no money in the republic. Trading was done in terms of a cattle currency,

ranging up from a goat, sheep and yearling calf to a small and large trek-ox.

The Basters also had their own way of describing distances. "Just over there," meant a ride of half an hour. "Near by" was three hours on horseback - not really misleading in the vast spaces of the Kalahari. When a Baster indicated a great distance he would point and say "daar-r-r-r!" They relied on the sun for the time, and when one white traveller offered a clock as a gift, Vilander was scornful. "What do we understand of such things?" he inquired. "But as you have plenty of guns, I would like a repeating rifle as my present." Lions roamed close to Vilander's house in those days.

This queer little republic attracted a few other white adventurers besides Halliburton. Vilander always encouraged marriages between white men and Baster girls, and granted a free farm with each bride. He invited the Rhenish Mission Society to send a missionary, and in 1885 Father Pabst was appointed. A church, which still stands, was finished six years later and Rietfon-

tein drew more Baster settlers and grew in importance. The fountain enabled the people to produce dates, grapes, figs, vegetables and roses in the desert.

Dirk Vilander died in 1888. Keenly alive to the danger of white encroachment on the little republic, he had never allowed his people to sell their land. During the last few years of his rule, however, the Mier country had been granted British protection. This was due to the German annexation of South-West Africa and the possibility of expansion eastwards. In fact, there had been a "border incident," for German officers had arrived at Rietfontein, hauled down the Union Jack at the newly-established police station, and hoisted their own flag. When the border was surveyed it was found that the western boundary of British territory was only two miles from the church at Rietfontein.

David Vilander, son of Dirk, was appointed a Sovereign Chief of Queen Victoria. That marked the end of the republic, but David and his Raad retained a certain amount of control over the

area. Unfortunately David, though he was broad-minded and honest, had none of his father's force of character. He retained the dubious services of Halliburton as secretary, but allowed white penetration to gain a foothold. First he sold mineral rights to a Port Elizabeth syndicate for a £500 subsidy, paid annually. Then he cut up the country into ten thousand morgen farms and issued title deeds. Every adult male Baster received a farm, and the rest were sold to Europeans - often for trifling amounts.

With a police station on the spot and a magistrate at Upington, the power of trying criminal cases was taken out of Vilander's hands. Once, however, a Hottentot was brought in on a charge of killing a white farmer's cow. Vilander gave the Hottentot the choice of going to Upington under arrest or taking twenty lashes at Rietfontein. The Hottentot chose the flogging. When this news reached Upington, the magistrate disapproved strongly. Vilander was reprimanded and his powers were severely curtailed.

Soon the short-lived glory of the House of Vilander was to depart entirely. His territory became part of British Bechuanaland in 1891. The new rulers recognised Vilander's title deeds, eleven in favour of Europeans and fifty-three granted to Basters. Under white pressure from the south, however, the Basters began to sell out and trek away. David Vilander took up arms in the South African War and was killed on his own farm in 1902 by a Boer commando. Father Pabst left Rietfontein in 1912, and the place degenerated. There are still a number of Basters round about Rietfontein, but they work for the white farmers.

Vilander's house remains at Rietfontein, with a few date palms as reminders of the old, almost vanished oasis. The fountain has lost its strength, and the descendants of the people who once had their own republic have scattered.

Only a bold man, you might imagine, would become a farmer in this far Kalahari region

where the Basters once found sanctuary. I think you would be right. In a good season it is the finest cattle country in South Africa; but in a thirsty summer the Kalahari is merciless and all living creatures shrink from the sun.

It looks empty on the map, and indeed you have to travel long distances, or wait for years, to find variety in the desert scene. Yet when the rains are good the Kalahari becomes a vast, undulating world of sweet, rich grass. Once or twice in a century the rivers run, lakes are created, and then the transformation is miraculous. I was there when the farmers were growing wheat round the vleis. That was in 1936, and it had happened only once before - in 1895, when an Upton storekeeper sent samples of Kalahari wheat and maize to an exhibition in Chicago and secured the highest prizes.

Traders were the first white men to discover the possibilities here, as they did in many another empty stretch of Africa. The pioneer, I believe, was Willem Spangenberg of Malmesbury, who

trekked into this part of the Kalahari as far back as 1860 with his wagons loaded with ammunition. He took cattle in exchange and sold it in Vryburg.

Spangenberg was a small man physically, but he had the character that defeats the Kalahari. He started a cattle farm up there in 1870. He rode in a horse-race at the age of eighty four, and won. When he died in 1934 he was 105 years of age. I am always coming across very old men on this journey, and I am convinced that the free and leisurely life of the ox-wagon days laid a foundation of health which is often lacking to-day.

Not long after Spangenberg came the Rautenbachs, whose descendants are still living in the desert. These three brothers were genuine adventurers, and in those spacious days they prospered. One box of ostrich feathers which they sent to Port Elizabeth fetched £1,000. Stephanus Rautenbach built a mansion in the Kalahari at a time when much of the building material had to be hauled by ox-wagon from De

Aar. It was an eight-roomed mansion with a broad stoep all round, and inside was the first piano ever seen deep in the desert. The place was so remote that when his children went to school at the Cape they saw their home again every second year.

Stephanus Rautenbach had an enormous farm. He had advanced David Vilander £1,500; and at last Vilander, with the consent of his Raad, ceded Rautenbach all the land from Mier, down the border for sixty-miles, and right across to the Bechuanaland dunes in the west. Rautenbach dug wells, built storage dams, and started ranching on a large scale. He also worked the salt pans far out in the eastern desert.

I knew only one of the early traders - Albert Jackson, who settled at Rietfontein in 1894 and remained there for four years. Jackson felt lonely on arrival and he decided to organise his own postal service. He engaged a Hottentot runner and gave him a pair of velskoens. The Hottentot travelled on his bare feet, saying that the shoes were too good to wear. Jackson was paying £50

a year out of his own pocket for this service; but others soon took advantage of it and the mailbags became too heavy for the Hottentot to carry.

In a moment of inspiration Jackson wrote to Cecil Rhodes at Groote Schuur and asked whether camels (which had just been imported into South Africa) could be sent to the Kalahari. Two camels arrived, and Jackson was appointed postmaster. Camels, I may add, were still shuffling through the sand with the mailbags until 1929, when the desert mail motor service was started. And the police to-day still use camels for some of their patrols. I saw hundreds at the Witdraai training station. Before long the jeep will oust the camel; but men will still talk of the constable who covered 170 miles in thirty-six hours during a desperate Kalahari camel ride.

Jackson once dealt with a small-pox epidemic in the Rietfontein area. The doctor who had been sent to vaccinate everyone soon wearied of desert surroundings; so he taught Jackson how to wield the scalpel and thankfully departed.

Jackson carried on conscientiously, but farmers and their families gathered at his store and at last there was no more vaccine. The resourceful Jackson then substituted condensed milk and sent everyone away happy.

Another early trader was Christoffel le Riche, born in Noordhoek in the Cape Peninsula. He had been a trader in the southern part of South-West Africa, and in 1892 he took his wife and two children into the Kalahari. The oxen nearly died of thirst before Le Riche's wagons reached Rietfontein. Mrs. le Riche was the second white woman to settle in the area; the first was a member of the mission.

Trekboers passed through the territory in the "nineties" of last century, attracted by the phenomenal rains. Some of them remained when Vilander sold off farms in the Baster "republic." Early this century the Cape Government was selling huge Kalahari farms at £100 apiece, and giving the farmers fifty-six years to pay off the money. They were people who had never before owned land, these pioneers, and they endured

almost incredible hardships. Even now, with deep bore-holes, windmills, steam pumps and motors, the struggle for water often becomes an ordeal and the cattle have to remain thirsty for days.

It was at Rietfontein that a British colonel of the Royal Engineers met two German officers and organised the international frontier survey. The handsome, cast-iron beacon plates they erected still stand - plates bearing the German eagle on the left, with the words "Deutsches Schutzgebiet"; and on the right the British coat-of-arms and "British Territory." For half a century these plates have been baked by the sun and blasted by sand. Each one has a number, and the beacons are marked on large-scale maps so that a lost traveller, finding a beacon in the desert, could fix his position exactly. Most of them are in extremely remote country.

The whole border between the Caprivi Strip and the Orange River was surveyed between 1898 and 1900, and a thirsty job it was. Often the wagons were damaged and the oxen died. Sir

David Gill, the astronomer, directed the work from the Cape. Few territories elsewhere in the world are separated by perfectly straight frontiers. This one has two right angles; otherwise it runs as straight as an arrow.

Many of the Kalahari farms along the Molopo bear Scottish names which seem incongruous to anyone who has journeyed up that dusty river. Linlithgow, Loch na Gar, Loch Maree, Loch Leven, Kirkliston, Lochiel, even Loch Lomond are to be found on the map. Just across the bed of the Molopo you discover, as a contrast, more realistic Afrikaans and Hottentot farm names - Leeuwvlei, Zoutpan, Inkbosch Pan and Obobogorop.

A little further north a farm originally named "Oskort," because of a missing ox, has now become Oxford.

Among the pans is Haakscheen which must rank as one of the most remarkable in Southern Africa. Sixteen miles long and six in width, it would make a marvellous speedway. Indeed Sir

Malcolm Campbell flew to Haakscheen Pan and examined it before he finally selected Verneuk Pan for his attempt on the world land speed record. Mirage at Haakscheen, however, is even more fantastic than at Verneuk, and the place was too far from civilisation for Campbell's attempt.

It becomes a fine sheet of water after heavy rain, attracting wild fowl from the whole southern Kalahari. The water moves across the hard floor of the pan with the wind, and is never more than two feet deep. When it dries, a dazzling white deposit of salt covers the surface. To the east of Haakscheen is a salt pan which has been worked for many years; and there are others in the Kalahari which would be more profitable if the distances to railhead were not so great.

Pans, dunes and hard stony veld, plains with flat ridges and kameeldoorn trees, river beds that widen to hundreds of yards and narrow to deep sluits ... that is the Rietfontein country. Sometimes the red dunes creep into the plains like tongues of vermilion. All the dunes,

whipped into shape by the summer north winds, run east and west in line after parallel line. Between the dunes are the "straate" - the "streets" of clear ground where cars and wagons find ways of avoiding the menace of the sand.

No country in the world has a more bracing climate for a few winter months. In summer, between the thunderstorms in the shadeless Kalahari, horses drop dead under their riders.

Yet the summer thunderstorms bring the scanty rain which nourishes the t'samma, the "life blood of the Kalahari," the dark green gourd which enables men and animals to survive. The first rain starts the seeds growing. Two months later the t'samma is up and for a year you can travel anywhere without fear of thirst. Good t'samma seasons, however, are often followed by poor ones; but when the t'samma is there it will support all forms of life.

Bushmen eat t'samma as fruit, roast it in the ashes, stew it with game. The oily seeds are ground between stones and made into flour.

Cattle fatten rapidly on t'samma. Horses devour it eagerly.

With the t'samma comes the more palatable wild cucumber and the larger, sweeter gemsbok cucumber. There is also a winter crop known as the "Kalahari potato" - the Nabba of the Bushmen. This is reminiscent of the European truffle, a rich, wild vegetable which is found near the surface under cracks in the soil.

Only twice within living memory have the Kalahari rivers come down in full flood. David Livingstone inquired into the strange weather of the desert, and learnt that in 1806 the Nossob had flowed strongly. Not until 1894 did the Nossob, the Molopa and all the other dry watercourses carry volumes of water again. Then forty more years passed, and again there was a deluge. As I have said, I saw this miracle two years later, and the desert was still a garden. I often wonder whether the rivers will run again in my time, for I should like to see those grey trenches brimming and forming huge lakes among the dunes.

Two events of the 1934 floods are still discussed by the Kalahari farmers. One was Rautenbach's voyage down the Molopo; the other was the mystery of the fish.

It was due to a bet with the sergeant of the camel police at Witdraai that Mr. Gordon Rautenbach built himself a ship of corrugated iron and petrol tins. She was launched from his farm and named Molopa Majestic. Rautenbach carried souvenir postcards which he delivered to astonished farmers along the route normally covered by the desert mail cars. Three times during that historic voyage his queer craft almost foundered and drowned him in the desert. When he reached the lake at Abiquas Puts he decided to end the perilous trip.

Abiquas Puts is a place with a queer story. For centuries, it is certain, the Molopa was a tributary of the Orange. Just below the Aughrabies canyon you can see the old junction where the Molopo rushed through the mountains and leapt over a cliff eight hundred feet high. But in 1894, and again in 1934, the weakened Molopo

was unable to follow its old course. It wandered among the dunes, conquering some, flooding many thousands of morgen, but came to a dead end at last amid the sand barrier at Abiquas Puts. The lake it formed was photographed from the air, and found to be thirty square miles in area. Depths varied from fifteen to twenty feet.

In this lake, and wherever the floods left vleis, the farmers saw fish. Jackson, the trader, told me that the same thing happened during the 1894 floods. Thousands of barbel were caught, pickled and salted. For a year anyone with a net could have fresh fish in the Kalahari. As the water evaporated under the sun, the shores of these lakes were littered with dead fish. Vultures fed on them by day, and at night the jackals came. Some of the fish weighed six pounds. Not only barbel, but carp and trout appeared. The fish became a great topic, and the cause of violent controversy, in this land of meat-eaters. Specimens were bottled with formalin and sent off to the Witwatersrand University in the hope that the scientists would settle the argument.

The scientists were baffled. There are mud fish capable of surviving long droughts in muddy wells, or even sandy hollows where moisture remains. Some said the fish had been there all the time, and had come to life and multiplied during the floods. But as I have already recorded, these were not mud fish.

Light came from South-West Africa, where the Auob, the Elephant and the Nossob rivers have their origins. The floods had swept away many dams in that territory, and the dams had been stocked with the very fish which were caught in the Kalahari hundreds of miles to the south.

When the desert lakes dried up completely, I must add, the stench of dead fish polluted the desert air and no one could live within a mile of the evaporated areas.

Many farmers lost their homes in the 1934 floods, but they balanced temporary discomforts against a vastly improved water supply. Throughout the century springs had been dropping, wells had run dry, bore-holes had been

driven deeper and deeper to follow the receding water. After the floods the water levels rose everywhere. A great Kalahari flood builds up underground reservoirs that last for years.

When I last saw this area, however, in the grim winter of 1947, the Mier country was drier than it had been for decades. Many farm-houses were empty, windmills locked, and the bones of gemsbok littered the sandy tracks. The Kalahari will be a pasture again one day, but it does take courage to farm between the red dunes to the north of Upington.

CHAPTER 6

FRONTIER POLICE

THIS LONG and lonely desert frontier was patrolled in the early years of the century by a section of the Cape Police known as D2, Kimberley Division. Like the more famous Canadian "mounties," they were men who spent their lives in remote places, where months of boredom were varied by adventurous days.

Troopers in the Cape Police were not all banished to the Kalahari and the posts along the Orange River. Some remained in fairly civilised places. I have it from an old member of the force that the more truculent and restless spirits found themselves transferred to the desert; they were the ones who slept on the veld for a year or more at a stretch and almost forgot how to behave at table.

Nearly all of them were mounted on small colonial-bred horses, and before long the force was renamed Cape Mounted Police. They wore a uniform which would have looked well in a modern film, but which irked them on the frontier. Smasher hats turned up at one side, tight khaki tunics, bandoliers, white riding breeches, blue puttees and black boots with spurs - that was the outfit. Just try to keep a pair of white breeches clean in the Kalahari.

Some of the men from overseas were attracted by advertisements in the Scotsman and other newspapers. Many were born in South Africa, and a fair number had Afrikaans names. Those

who knew the veld soon taught the newcomers. The training depot was in the Cape Town suburb of Maitland, where the young recruits met a number of lion-tamers and went through a strenuous course of riding, drill, musketry and law.

Late in 1902 a detachment of Cape Mounted Police was sent to Kenhardt and “points north” to restore civil law after the chaos of the South African War. New police stations were established; but there were no buildings and often not even tents. “Two men with a pack-horse under a bush” formed a police station in those days, and the lucky ones had reed shelters.

The unluckiest troopers were those who had to break in camels at the new station at Witdraai. There were many accidents. One man who later became a well-known detective head constable in Cape Town described the life to me. “I was chased by an angry bull camel - they go mad without warning at certain seasons,” he recalled. “Many troopers were severely bitten, and one lost an arm.”

When they had mastered the art of camel riding they set off on desert patrols. A patrol might last for ten weeks. My friend was told to register births and deaths among the Bushmen. There was a fee of a shilling for each one registered, so that he enjoyed the work; but his main problem was to find the Bushmen. By day they made themselves invisible among the dunes. Sometimes he put an ear to the sand at night and heard them pounding their t’samma melons. That led him to their camps.

He had to invent names for them, and guess their ages by the weird events they remembered, or by their sizes. They were wild people with a strong antipathy to white men.

It was at Witdraai that this trooper saw the ghastly effects of thirst in the desert. Two white men and four natives had set out from Vryburg with an ox-wagon in search of gold. One day a white man staggered up on foot to the well at Witdraai and collapsed. He was the only survivor. His tongue was swollen, he was delirious, and he had to be lashed down on a

bed to prevent him from injuring himself. Three weeks passed before the man could talk. He lived on coffee.

My friend had a narrow escape himself when he stayed out on the trail himself too long while arresting Bushman cattle thieves. When the last drop of water had gone and he had failed to find melons he persuaded one of his prisoners to lead him to water. The Bushman dug into the sand dune, where no signs were visible, and uncovered eight ostrich eggs filled with water.

A young Irish trooper named McShane was alone on patrol between Zwartmodder and Nakob when he lost his horse. He had just reported the death of a native woman from thirst; now he was in the same predicament. His water supply was on the horse. McShane followed the tracks for a time; then rested under a bush to escape from the December heat. His horse was found, and the Hottentot trackers hastened along McShane's trail.

Everyone knew that if he was not found soon in that heat it would be too late.

The spoor showed signs that McShane was weakening. He wandered, circled, crossed his own tracks fell exhausted again, and again - then picked himself up and stepped out briskly towards a dune four miles away. The whole story was told by the marks in the sand. McShane lay down quietly on the far side of the dune. There the trackers found him, seven days after he had left Zwartmodder. He had been dead for four days. "He died at least peacefully, too utterly worn out to struggle even in death, for he was fully dressed in tunic and leggings, and his smasher hat was still in position on his head," reported the officer in charge of the search party. "We dug a grave by firelight, and at midnight we buried him, with a parting salute from his comrades."

The Cape Mounted Police patrolled far beyond the telegraph lines. Helio stations were set up, and in that clear air the bright mirrors worked as efficiently as modern wireless stations. One old hand declared that the operators became so expert that they could tell whether the next man down the line was suffering from a “witblits” hangover - just by the flash of his mirror.

Some of the border police posts were situated directly opposite German posts. The Germans lived in greater comfort than the Cape Police, and were often well stocked with beer. “We did not speak of ‘one over the eight’ on the border it was ‘one over the sixteen’,” confessed an old sergeant.

Many of the old posts have vanished. One man I met spent eight years at Scuit Drift, forty miles west of the Aughrabies Falls, a station which has never been reopened since the Germans destroyed it in 1914.

Commercial travellers in wagonettes or Cape carts sometimes spent a night at the remote posts, and then there was always a celebration.

After about a year in the desert the men of the Cape Mounted Police had new duties thrust upon them. Over the border in German South-West Africa the Hottentots rose in revolt; and the police had to deal with gun-runners and other filibusters, cattle-lifters and fugitives. The four years of the German-Hottentot war was the most active period of the Cape Mounted Police in the desert.

Among these who crossed the border were Hottentots with prices on their heads. Many members of the Cape Mounted Police sympathised with the Hottentots in their hopeless struggle against the German Army; and those who arrived in the Cape Colony found sanctuary. At one period of the campaign, however, it was reported that two C.M.P. troopers of German extraction were catching Hottentot fugitives and handing them back to the Germans for the sake of a reward of £10 a head.

Trooper J. A. Peacock (afterwards a detective in Cape Town) crossed into German South-West Africa, took statements from witnesses, dug up a corpse, and collected evidence which resulted in the two troopers being charged with the rare crime of "man stealing." The troopers were tried at Upington, but the jury disagreed. They were tried again at Prieska, but again the jury disagreed. A third trial was held in Cape Town, and when this jury disagreed the men were discharged. You will find "man stealing" discussed in legal text-books, with much learned argument based on the facts of Trooper Peacock's queer case an the Kalahari frontier forty years ago.

Probably the longest desert patrol ever carried out by the camel section of the Cape Mounted police was that which left Rietfontein in July, 1906. Sub-Inspector Attwood and five men rode to Twee Rivieren, junction of the Auob and Nossob. There they split up, one party riding up the Nossob, the other crossing the present game reserve. They met again near Groot Kolk, rode

due west by compass to the Auob, and then returned to Rietfontein.

During this patrol they covered nearly six hundred miles. Both the men and the camels relied on the t'samma for liquid nourishment; the camels went without water for nineteen days and remained in good condition.

I came across an old official report recently about the men of the camel patrol. "The men quartered at Rietfontein and Witdraai are almost as inured to hardships and thirst as the Hottentots themselves," said the report. "Their duties have been well and cheerfully performed."

And here is one unrecorded fragment which would never find its way into an official report. One of the old camel troopers told me that he was riding alone between the dunes forty years ago in an area beyond the last farms - a stretch of Kalahari where he might easily have left the first footprints. There in that wilderness his alert eye discovered two London tram-tickets. One had

been punched at Petticoat Lane, the other at Pall Mall. The problem is still puzzling him.

Magistrates at Rietfontein were among the last in the old Cape Colony to find Bushmen in the dock before them. Mr. Harry Drew, who retired a few years ago as chief magistrate of Cape Town, was stationed at Rietfontein from 1909 to 1913; and he related to me one of the most revealing tales of Bushman mentality I have heard.

A wild Bushman was brought into Rietfontein on a charge of murder. Lelik, as the police called this Bushman, had asked another Bushman for his daughter. When the man refused, Lelik had killed him; and as the daughter proved unwilling, Lelik had killed her too. Mr. Drew held a preparatory examination; and then sent Lelik and all the Bushman witnesses to Cape Town for the trial.

Weeks later the police at Rietfontein heard that the returning witnesses were in distress in the desert. They had set out on foot from Upington,

failed to find t'samma or food, and were in danger of perishing. They were rescued and brought to Mr. Drew's office; a band of almost naked Bushmen carrying the boots and clothes they had been given over their shoulders. Mr. Drew was eager to learn their reactions to civilisation, and questioned them at length.

"Where have you been all this time?" inquired Mr. Drew simply.

"Beyond that distant star - to a very big place there."

"How did you get there?"

"By ox-wagon to Prieska, and then in a house."

"You mean to tell me that you travelled in a house?"

"Yes, the house made noises - 'coo... coo ... boom ... boom ...' and then it moved and took us to the place beyond that star. The house was not drawn by oxen. It just moved."

Mr. Drew shook his head in wonder at this description of a railway journey. "Were there many people in the place beyond the star?"

One of the Bushmen pointed to a column of ants. "The people were like that."

"Did they have much water?"

"Their dam was so big that you could not see the wall at the end of it."

Mr. Drew put a final question. "What was the most wonderful thing you noticed in this far place?"

The Bushmen were all agreed on that point. They walked in the far place and they could not see their own tracks. That baffled them. In the desert their lives depended on their ability to track themselves back to a starting point. On the city pavements their little feet left no impressions.

The blackest deed ever committed on this border, I think, was the murder of Presgrave. Old men up there talk of it now with the same horror the

crime aroused when it first became known more than forty years ago. Presgrave was an Australian, an adventurer greatly admired on the Cape side of the border. He ran guns to the Hottentots and brought back cattle in exchange. After the Germans had been outwitted again and again they placed a price of five hundred marks on Presgrave's head - £25.

Thus tempted, two Kalahari farmers set a trap for Presgrave. They informed him that the Hottentots would be waiting for him with a large herd of cattle on the German side of the border near a place called Witkop. There they met Presgrave at the appointed time, and shot him. They cut off his head and rode to Keetmanshoop to claim their "blood money."

The German garrison commander paid the murderers. It is said that he dipped each note in Presgrave's blood before passing the money across the table. Then he had the two men thrown out of his office. That part of the story is still told in Keetmanshoop, and it does not sound fanciful.

I heard the sequel from a South African army officer named Reid, who was serving in 1922 as a constable in the South-West African Police. Reid was stationed for two years at Aroab, the first village reached after crossing the border from Rietfontein. He had met both the murderers. About sixteen years had passed since Presgrave's death. During that time, said Reid, the farms owned by the murderers had been ravaged by veld fires and they had lost their stock. One man's face had been eaten away by a malignant growth and he died years ago. The other man, I believe, is still alive, shunned by his neighbours and with a most uneasy conscience. Every detail of this crime reached Australia. I am told that when the Australian troops were passing through Cape Town in 1915, several men deserted and were intercepted on the train bound for Upington. They had planned to avenge Presgrave's death.

One day during the German-Hottentot war the Cape Mounted Police officer at Rietfontein sent this message by helio: "European arrived here in exhausted state, alleges name is Ironside, Imperial officer employed on special service, please verify and instruct."

The exhausted man who had trudged through the desert and across the border was no impostor. He was Captain Ironside of the Royal Artillery, later Field Marshal Sir Edmund Ironside. In the early years of this century Ironside was posted to Roberts Heights as an intelligence officer. He learnt to speak Afrikaans like a Transvaal Boer; then he grew a beard and slipped across into German South-West Africa to find out whether the German military forces were being built up for the native wars - or some more important campaign.

Ironside was accepted by the Germans as an Afrikaner and employed as a transport rider. He had his dog with him, a mongrel which he had befriended in Pretoria; and one night Ironside was alarmed to find the dog still wearing a collar

bearing the name “Captain Ironside R.A.” This mistake might have proved fatal, but apparently the Germans had never looked at the collar.

Months passed before the suspicions of the Germans were aroused. Then they played an old trick on Ironside. He had pretended that he knew no English. He awoke one night to find a German asking him questions in English. It is not easy to catch a man like Ironside off his guard, and sleepy though he was, he replied in Afrikaans. Nevertheless, he saw that the game was up, and at the first opportunity he took a water bottle and some food and headed for Rietfontein.

Ironside’s maps of the border, with every water-hole marked accurately, were used long afterwards, in the 1914-1918 War and again in 1922 when the Bondelswarts rose in revolt. He must have been an ideal intelligence officer and a fine linguist. I am told that he got on well with the Germans for months by holding forth on every possible occasion as a great admirer of the Kaiser!

The Cape Mounted Police saw one side of the German-Hottentot war. It was a bitter struggle, and though I have read many accounts of it, a former German officer recently threw a new light on it for me. Hauptmann Eres von Schauroth is his name, one of those old German aristocrats who looked with contempt upon the Nazi upstarts. He lives in a castle on the farm Blinkoog in the Karasburg district, far to the east of the village and close to the Cape frontier.

This castle of Von Schauroth, by the way, must not be confused with the fantastic and luxurious Schloss Duwisib far to the west in the Maltahohe district. “This is a poor man’s castle,” remarked Von Schauroth as he showed me round the large, turreted stone building.

Von Schauroth was a Guards’ officer. He thought that he would never see a shot fired if he remained in Germany, so in 1904 he volunteered to go to the Hottentot war as a “Schutztruppe”

officer. He paid a high tribute to the chivalry of the Bondelswarts during the long war in the sand and the mountains of the south.

The Bondelswarts, and especially their leader Marengo, never harmed non-combatants, or women and children. After one fight in which some German transport wagons had been ambushed, Marengo sent a message to the German garrison commander at Ukamas asking for a doctor to attend the German wounded.

Marengo had a flesh wound, too, and the doctor bandaged him. Marengo wrote a letter of appreciation and gave the doctor safe conduct through his lines.

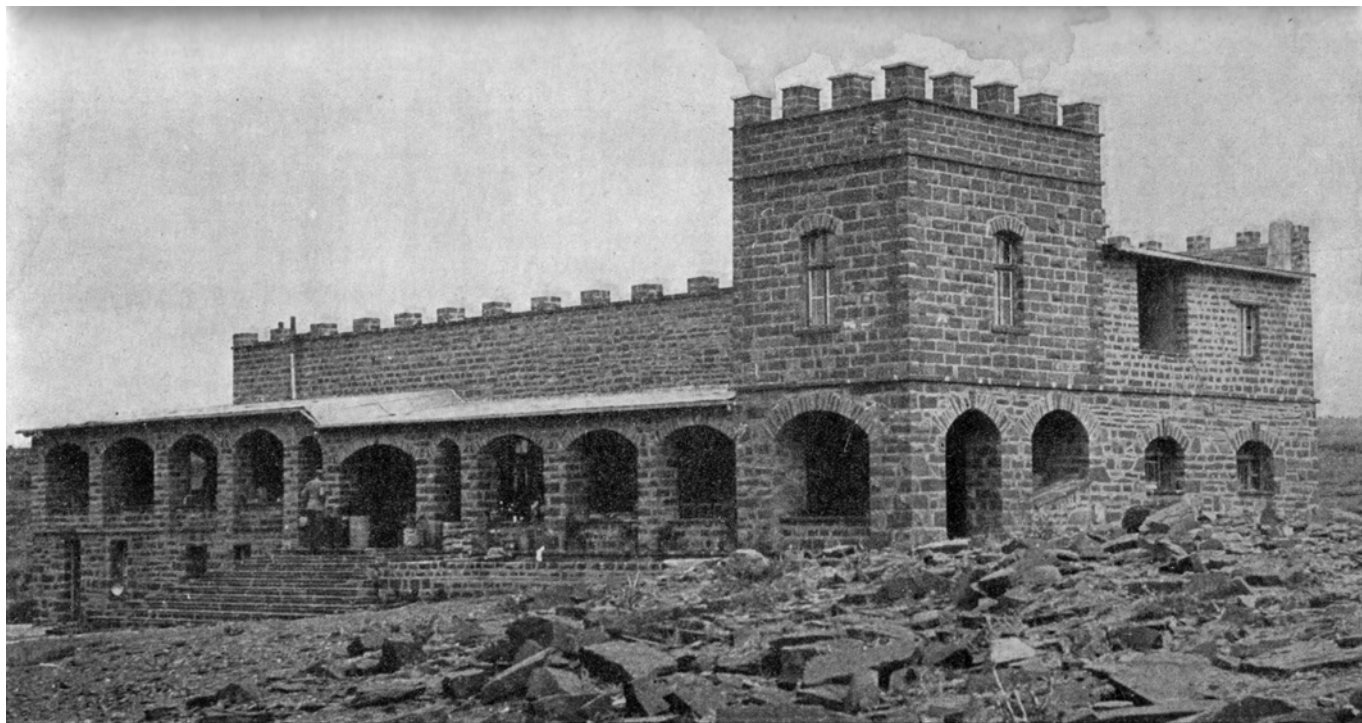
Warmbad had a small garrison, and when the Germans saw that a siege was inevitable they sent their women and children out of the village to the farms, knowing that the Hottentots would not molest them.

Von Schauroth saw the graves of four German officers, killed in action. The Hottentots had placed on each grave not only the medals each

officer had worn, but also his money and other personal possessions.

One day Von Schauroth arrived at the Roman Catholic mission at Heirachabis, close to the Gordonia border. The priests warned him that Marengo was nearby with two hundred men. Soon afterwards Marengo sent in a message stating that he would not shoot anyone at the mission. "I know there is a spy there, but he is safe in that sanctuary," wrote Marengo.

On another occasion the Hottentots had attacked a German supply column. They had killed the soldiers and were plundering the wagons when they saw an armed German in uniform approaching. He, too, was killed; and only then did the Hottentots notice the dead man's medical badges. The leader wrote a note regretting the mistake, and pointing out that doctors who went unarmed would not be shot.



Von Schaueroth's "castle" near the Kalahari frontier in South-West Africa—the land of castles

Von Schauroth saw war coming in 1914 and decided to rejoin the Guards in Germany. It was a forlorn hope, for he spoke little English, and he aimed at crossing the Union and reaching Lourenco Marques. He was arrested in Upington and sent to the military internment camp at Maritzburg.

“I escaped three times, and became such a nuisance that in 1916 the authorities allowed me to return to my farm on parole,” said Von Schauroth.” Then I started building my castle. After thirty years it is not yet finished.”

Nevertheless I liked the bold design, the broad, covered stoep with heads and horns, and the hall with its high ceiling. The Germans of Von Schauroth’s type were true pioneers. They could not have Rhine castles, so they built their own stone castles above sun-baked river beds on the edge of the Kalahari. They brought out their treasured family portraits in oils, their signed photographs of German royal personages, their antlers and gilded pianos. Though they lived in exile, they came to love the country of their

adoption. They have had extremely hard lives, many of them; but as I have said, many of them refused, even under pressure, to join the Nazis; and now at last they are more comfortable in South-West Africa than in Germany. Soon it will be hard to find them, for the days of their youth were the early years of this century.

Von Schauroth is a fine, tall, lean old man with an upturned grey moustache and tanned face. His castle is one of the sights of the frontier country, but too far from anywhere to be a showplace. It may be a poor man’s castle, but it shares the owner’s dignity. The desert frontier would be barren indeed without such places - and such men as Von Schauroth, who know how to pay a tribute even to a Hottentot enemy.

Towards the end of the German-Hottentot war this distant Kalahari border became the scene of a strange affair which might have developed into an international incident. This was the Ferreira

Raid, an almost forgotten episode which shook South Africa, and which is still something of a mystery.

John Hendrik Ferreira, a tall, swarthy man of twenty-two, was the leader or “general” as he called himself. His “commandant” was his half-brother Piet Ferreira, *alias* Fischer, who had fought for the Transvaal Republic and then taken refuge in German South-West Africa.

Just before the raid John Ferreira, a naturalised German subject, was in command of a band of scouts (or spies) in the war against the Hottentots. Piet was a wagon-master at the German outpost of Davignab, thirty miles from the Cape border. A man stationed at Davignab supplied me with the unrecorded history of the first moves in this remarkable affair. Piet Ferreira came to him early in November, 1906, and said that he wanted leave to visit John near the Karas mountains; he also borrowed a rifle, as he said there were a lot of springbok along the route. Shortly afterwards my informant found that two

other men had left with Piet Ferreira and that their horses were missing.

The Ferreira “army” that crossed the border on November 6th, 1906, had a total strength of six, all wearing German khaki and military hats. They crossed on to the farm Abiqua’s Aar, near the Abiam police post. Corporal Skinner of the Cape Mounted Police found them watering their horses; and they told him they were members of a German patrol looking for forty horses and mules which had strayed from Davignab.

“I shall report you for crossing the border,” said Skinner.

One of the Ferreira’s then shouted: “Hands up, you are my prisoner.” A raider named Hendrik Jooste thrust a revolver into Skinner’s face and disarmed him. Skinner was told that the Transvaal had risen in revolt, and that a commando of 150 men was on the way from German South-West Africa to join the rebels. Skinner’s horse was taken, and the raiders then rode off.

Skinner sent a warning message to Zwartmodder. All down the line the helios flashed, and when the news reached Cape Town, the Cabinet Ministers regarded the possible political consequences in the most serious light. Colonel Crewe appealed to Mr. J. H. Hofmeyr; and "Onze Jan," putting aside all party considerations, telegraphed to friends in the North-West Cape urging them to use their influence to prevent a rebellion.

At the back of many highly-placed minds, too, was the thought that the Germans might have had a hand in the raid. It seemed significant that the raiders had come from German territory. There were only a few dozen members of the Cape Mounted Police in the Gordonia district; so Colonel (afterwards General Sir Henry) Lukin was ordered to the scene from King William's Town with 150 Cape Mounted Riflemen and Cape Mounted Police.

Meanwhile the raiders were enjoying a temporary superiority in the lonely Kalahari dunes. They had forced or persuaded about two dozen

farmers to join them, and they swooped down on Abiam police post at night. Shots were fired into a tent, and Troopers Cox and Bellew were wounded. Corporal Skinner and two other troopers escaped and went in search of medical help.

The raiders looted Abiam, set fire to a forage store close to the tent where Bellew lay dying, and carried off arms, ammunition and horses. They rode on towards Zwartmodder, commandeering more farmers on the way. At one farm they tried to take the son of a farmer named Van der Merwe. The father defied them. "Shoot me, but let my son alone," he said. Jooste fired his revolver at a range of fifteen feet, but the bullet went through the brim of Van der Merwe's hat. Then the raiders galloped on; each man had two horses and they travelled fast.

They intercepted a post-cart bound for Rietfontein, opened the letters and took £11 in cash. A parcel addressed to Sub-Inspector Attwood was found to contain two pairs of riding breeches, made by a London tailor.

Captain White of Upington had received Skinner's message and was on the way north while the lawless Ferreiras were trying on Attwood's breeches: He had eighteen police and twenty-five armed Basters with him. When he reached Abiam, however, poor Bellew had died from the bullet wound in his lung. Cox was sent to Upington on a spring wagon, and recovered.

Several patrols were now converging on the Ferreira gang. Captain White was the first to come up with them about twenty miles north-east of Upington, and a brisk engagement followed. One raider was killed. The Ferreiras broke off and retreated towards the Kalahari but a police officer followed and scattered the raiders.

It was thought that the Ferreiras would try to return to German South-West Africa, so Sub-Inspector Attwood patrolled the border. Lieut-Colonel von Estorff, commanding the German forces near the border, promised his cooperation.

The Ferreiras and their men, however, were riding hard for various drifts along the Orange River, hoping to find sanctuary in the wilderness of Bushmanland. If the river had been low, the gang might have remained at liberty for months. But the Orange was in flood. It was impossible to cross, and every drift was being watched. By November 16th the Ferreiras and all the raiders had been captured.

This was smart police work in view of the loneliness of the country. The credit went to Lukin's detachment of Cape Mounted Police, which had covered 150 miles in sixty-eight hours after leaving Prieska. The Cape Mounted Riflemen also rode well, but they were too late.

Among those who were seen armed was one of Presgrave's murderers, but nothing could be proved against him.

The Ferreiras had tried to force a famous old Kalahari hunter and prospector named Pearson to join them. When he refused they blindfolded him and told him to say his prayers. "Shoot and

be damned,” replied Pearson. They left this bold man after robbing his camp. Soon afterwards Pearson linked up with the police and helped them to overtake the raiders.

The two Ferreiras and three men who had crossed the border with them - Potgieter, Retief and Jooste - were tried at Kimberley for the murder of Trooper Bellew. The trial opened on February 18th, 1907, and lasted three days.

John Ferreira declared in evidence that he had been twice decorated by the Germans during the native war. A Captain Siebert, he said, had ordered him across the Gape border “to stir up the people and create a diversion with a probable result beneficial to the Germans.” Later Siebert gave him the date of the raid and handed him £200. “Commandeer men, arrest and wage war,” were the orders Ferreira swore he had received. “When you cross the border, fire - don’t wait.”

Jooste was the only other member of the gang to give evidence. He said he had acted under

compulsion. When Ferreira approached him he said: “I came to make wagons - not war.” He was, in fact, a wagon-maker from Worcester.

Potgieter adopted the same line; he pleaded that he was under the command of one of the Ferreiras, and would have been shot if he had refused to cross the border. Retief asked for his youth and innocence to be taken into consideration.

Hauptman Max Brosig of the artillery and other German officers who gave evidence stated that they knew nothing of the raid, and this was accepted by the jury. All five men were sentenced to death, Potgieter and Retief receiving recommendations to mercy.

“You may call yourselves raiders or marauders, but you stand there convicted of a cold-blooded murder,” remarked the judge. But even the judge was unable to put his finger on the motive for the raid, and he expressed the bewilderment which all have felt who have studied this strange affair. He did not know, he said, whether the motive

was robbery or the desire to stir up mischief; and it did not matter.

My father, who was editor of the *Diamond Fields* Advertiser in Kimberley at the time, was puzzled by the affair then as I am to-day. After the trial he wrote a leading article in which he said: -

“It may, we think, be taken for granted that the party had some hopes of enriching themselves by loot, and that owing to the remoteness of the district in which they were operating, they believed that they would manage to elude capture. Whether Ferreira professed a political mission merely to serve as a cloak to his programme of rapine it is less easy to decide. It is quite possible that he was actuated in part by a desire for political notoriety and that, though no fool his vanity led him to underrate the difficulty of the task.”

The death sentences did not mark the end of the drama. On March 4th the Cape Argus published a letter written by Hendrik Jooste in Kimberley.

“This I am writing under my dead hand over which sentence of death has passed,” began Jooste. “It matters little now, for the verdict has been given and die I must. Within a few weeks I shall be no more, but I want you to publish this so that the world may know the truth.

“Twelve months’ experience in German South-West Africa has taught me this. Hundreds of Boers are engaged by the military in that country ... fellows of all classes. They spend their money faster than they earn it, and after the war is over hundreds will not know what to do ...

“The Germans know this well enough and encourage those classes to make war on their own government. The Germans are also very spiteful against the British because they have an idea that the war in their country is being prolonged by the British or Colonials supporting the natives with arms and ammunition.

“So I had an idea that trouble would arise. When I returned after my visit to Worcester the first thing I was told was that the war was at an end

and the Boers were going to fight the British. John Ferreira informed me that his captain wished him to cross into British territory, just like Dr. Jameson crossed into the Transvaal with a black flag. Ferreira said those that are not with him are against him, and then he will shoot dead. At this point I pretended to be quite in earnest to go along with him, but instead of that I made up my mind to escape.

“Now this is gospel. I pretended to be one with Ferreira, but I took good care not to do anything harmful to anyone. All that I took actual part in was that I supplied the wounded with same bandages.

“Ferreira was induced by the Germans to cross into the Colony, knowing that the rest of the Boers would follow. There you have the lot. I trust to hear from you before I depart from this miserable earth.”

On the day that this letter appeared the Cape Argus commented in an enigmatic leader: “The eye of the law sees only the plain, ugly, out-

standing fact that an innocent man’s life was taken in time of peace.”

Evidently something was going on behind the scenes, and it is probable that the newspaper knew more than the general public. At all events the Cape Argus leader was interpreted as an appeal for mercy; and contrary views flowed into the office.

The drama grew more intense a few days later, when the Cape Argus published what it described as a “manly letter” from John Ferreira. It may have been a noble effort on Ferreira’s part, or the last gamble of a cunning man. Ferreira wrote: -

“I cannot endure the terrible torture any longer, to think that the unfortunate four men who were sentenced with me have to face this terrible death through no fault of their own. I am prepared to confess that whatever these unfortunate four men did was done at my instigation, and they were all under my influence and orders.

“What I say here I shall confess on the day of my execution. I was ordered to bring about this unfortunate and unhappy crime at the command of and by order of.”

No doubt Ferreira had named one of the German officers, but the name was suppressed.

That day the *Cape Argus* leader said: “We think that his crime may be judged as a political crime and that it rests with His Excellency the Governor and Executive to exercise the prerogative of mercy towards the leader and the men who followed him.”

Shortly afterwards this came to pass. All the men were reprieved; the two Ferreriras and Jooste were sentenced to life imprisonment; Retief and Potgieter to fifteen years penal servitude. For a time they disappeared into the obscurity of the Breakwater Prison. The *Cape Times* protested against the reprieve, and then the Ferreriras were forgotten.

Jooste had a few days in the limelight, when his wife applied for a divorce on the ground of his

life sentence. After much legal argument she was successful.

Now comes one of the most startling aspects of the whole affair. Well within three years of being sentenced to death all the members of the Ferreira band were set at liberty. There was no official explanation, and in those days the newspapers had not the means of discovering the facts which they have today.

I do know, however, that the story told so convincingly by Jooste and John Ferreira from their death cells was not ignored. The jury had dismissed the plea of German instigation, but it seems that later on suspicion again fell on the Germans. That able police officer Lieut.-Colonel H. F. Trew made long and careful inquiries into the origin of the raid, but without much success. Three years is a short sentence for murder. I have searched all the available official documents for a clue, but I feel there are other documents locked away somewhere.

As I have said, the men of the Cape Mounted Police experienced months of boredom varied by adventurous days. The Ferreira Raid was one of those interludes, and the tale is still told by men who were there on the Kalahari border more than forty years ago.

Chapter 7

SCOTTY SMITH

WILDEST of all the reckless men who rode the Kalahari frontier was Scotty Smith. Every country has its Robin Hood, Dick Turpin or Captain Starlight - highwaymen of varying degrees of courtesy and crime. Scotty Smith was South Africa's most notorious outlaw for many years, a legendary figure whose exploits live after him.

I have pieced together many fragments of this desperate character's life, but I am fully aware of the gaps. George St. Leger Gordon Lennox, alias Scotty Smith, had so much to hide that it will never be possible to trace every step in his career.

He died nearly thirty years ago. Some who knew him are inclined to forget his black deeds and recall only the acts of charity which were undoubtedly typical of him. Nevertheless, I am bound to record that Scotty Smith was much too quick on the trigger. A horse and diamond thief may easily become a "gentle and kindly old man," as some have described this ruffian. But Scotty Smith was an unrepentant and murderous old freebooter, with only a few romantic interludes to lighten the dark memories.

There is no doubt that he was a descendant of a noble Scottish family - an illegitimate son, born in Perth, educated, trained as a veterinary surgeon and then shipped abroad as soon as possible. Dr. W. Meent Borchers of Uppington, who came to know the man well during the early part of this century, told me that Scotty first went to Australia. He was in the Kalgoorlie gold rush.

From there he moved across to India. He never held a commission, as many writers have stated,



Scotty Smith with his wife and family—a photograph taken in Upington a few years before his death

but was simply attached to a regiment as “vet”. During one of the hill campaigns Scotty observed that a cavalry squadron had lost its officer. He put himself at the head of the unit and ordered the men to charge. Casualties occurred during the fight, and Scotty found himself in serious trouble as a result of his misguided initiative. He used to boast that one of his uncles was commander-in-chief of the Indian Army at the time; but in spite of this relationship, he lost his job.

Thus, in 1880, Scotty came to South Africa. Much confusion has been caused by the fact that a previous Scotty Smith terrorised Stellenbosch about the middle of last century and, for his sins, helped to build the road over Bain’s Kloof in the Cape. The first Scotty was often chained to an iron ring which is still to be seen on a rock near the top of the pass. Scotty Gordon Lennox was a small boy at that time.

On arrival in the Cape, Scotty settled at King William’s Town. He found it impossible to make a living there as a “vet”, however, for the

farmers grudged him his fees and treated their own cattle more or less successfully. Scotty then joined a Cape mounted regiment. Discipline never held him for long, and when he heard of trouble between the Transvaal Republic and rebellious native chiefs he deserted and linked up with a band of gun-runners. The idea was to provide the natives with a cannon. The venture came to grief when the gun-runners were intercepted by a Boer patrol and the cannon was lost in a river. Scotty and his friends escaped.

Scotty really came into his own in 1883, when the Bechuanaland chiefs were at war with one another. The chiefs invited a number of white filibusters, Boer and British, over the border to take part in the campaign as mercenaries. One of these foreign legions had a marching song which reflected the lawless spirit of the period: -

Then shout boys shout, and don’t you be
afraid,
To-night we’ll all be marching in the
Stellaland brigade,

So bundle up your haversacks and go it while
you can,
To hell with the Lime-Juice Parliament, we'll
fight for Mankoroane.

The "Lime-Juice Parliament" was the Cape House of Assembly, which was watching events in the outposts with some anxiety. The warring chiefs speedily regretted their appeals, for some of the white adventurers joined forces, seized loot in the shape of cattle, and dispossessed the natives of their land. They set up two republics, Stellaland and Goschen; and at one time Stellaland nearly went to war with Goschen.

Once, during the freebooting days in Bechuanaland, Scotty was captured by a party of Boers and taken to their headquarters at Rooi Grond. He was sentenced to be shot the following day. That night he escaped from his bonds, selected two of the best horses in the camp, and rode off triumphantly. It is said that he joined a search party unrecognised and thoroughly enjoyed the futile pursuit.

Clearly Scotty was a superb actor, and there are many anecdotes of the difficult parts he played successfully and with gusto. He was a handsome man at this time with a ruddy face, flowing red beard and heavy eyebrows. His manner was courteous, and if he wished he could give a splendid impression of charm without guile.

Even in those days there were secret agents, and Scotty Smith was one of them. He served the British Government faithfully in that capacity for many years, and in several wars. At the time when no one knew whether Bechuanaland was in the Transvaal or British sphere of influence a public meeting was held in the old Town Hall at Kimberley. Scotty spoke forcefully in favour of a British expedition, and a resolution was passed urging the British Government to send troops. The direct outcome was Sir Charles Warren's mission and the annexation of the territory.

I have seen the original of a letter written by Scotty to a friend in Kimberley many years after the Bechuanaland affair. "I made a start and gave the Rev. John Mackenzie the credit of stopping

the Boors from going west (not Rhodes),” wrote Scotty. “Had the Boors gone west at that time they would have formed a union with the Germans and the Colony would only have extended as far as Griqualand West - if it existed at all.” He signed the letter “George St. Leger Lennox - Scotty Smith, born 22nd November, 1845, Not Out.”

Scotty once spent six months happily shooting elephants in northern Bechuanaland. He had tusks worth £500 when he turned southwards again. Near the Cape border he encountered a police patrol; and remembering past crimes he would have hurried away if he had not noticed signs of distress among the police. They told Scotty that they had lost their wagons and had used all their water. Scotty bargained with them for a safe conduct to Vryburg, where he wished to sell his ivory. The thirsty police sergeant agreed readily enough. Then Scotty led them to a water-hole and finally took them back to their wagons.

The truce lasted until Scotty had sold the tusks. All Vryburg gathered in the market square to watch the old outlaw ride off again into the blue. On that occasion Scotty received a grateful salute from the police.

Most of the Kimberley pioneers knew Scotty Smith, for he often visited the diamond fields. Two true stories have come down from those days, Mr. Goodchild, a well-known auctioneer, was holding the usual weekly sale on Market Square, and invited those present to test a fine riding horse. Scotty was present, with his hat pulled over his eyes. He accepted the auctioneer’s offer, dug his heels into the horse’s ribs and vanished round the Occidental Bar corner. “Going, for the third and last time ...” shouted Mr. Goodchild, expecting to see the horse returning at any moment.

Someone in the crowd whispered the magic words: “Scotty Smith.”

“Gone to Scotty Smith,” announced the auctioneer with a wry smile, “but whether the seller will ever see his money is another matter.”

Some time afterwards Scotty was arrested near Kimberley. He managed to slip his handcuffs; then he overpowered the plain clothes man escorting him and handcuffed him. Any other rogue would have been content to ride off. Scotty delivered his captive at the Kimberley gaol and acted his part so well that the furious detective was locked in a cell.

Scotty was once asked how he contrived to slip in and out of Kimberley so often when there were warrants out for his arrest and the police were looking for him. “Police?” guffawed Scotty. “There was nothing to fear from those boobs, and there was not a cell in the place that would have held me overnight. I was as safe on the diggings as in the Kalahari.”

At that period Scotty often went under the alias of Douglas MacDonald. He met an English parson’s son, down on his luck, and made him

his partner. The parson’s son, however, drew the line at armed hold-ups, and they soon separated.

Scotty was first convicted in a criminal court in Bloemfontein during March, 1885. Chief Justice Reitz was on the Bench, and the charge was robbery under arms. Scotty Smith, alias George Lennox, appeared with three other men, one of them a Kimberley police sergeant named Leigh.

They had waited near the border, on a road leading to the Orange River, knowing that an “I.D.B.” merchant, Samuel Kemp, would be passing that way with a packet of stolen diamonds. Kemp showed fight, so these four highwaymen attacked him with revolvers and knobkerries. The evidence showed that Scotty wore a black veil over his face and shouted: “Hands up.”

Kemp replied: “No hands up” and fired his revolver. Scotty and another man then fired on Kemp and struck him again and again with knobkerries until he collapsed. They departed with diamonds valued at £2,000.

The judge, in passing sentence, remarked to Scotty Smith: "It is a pity that a man of your appearance should deal in stolen property. There is no excuse for you; it is a gross crime. The boundary line is getting dangerous for our people. It is quite an accident that Kemp was not killed. I took you for a man who knew better. I will punish you severely."

Each man received four years hard labour, with twenty-five lashes apiece for Scotty and Leigh.

Mr. Arthur Barlow, M.P., then a youth, saw Scotty and his companions brought into Bloemfontein by a troop of burghers, and watched Gladwell, the town blacksmith, rivet the rings on Scotty's legs. Those were free-and-easy days, and because Scotty was popular with the gaolers he never received his lashes. Moreover, he was often allowed out of gaol to quench his thirst; and his peculiar sense of honour was such that he always returned at the stipulated time. I am told that he was released after a year in gaol; but the sentence had hardened him, if that were possible.

He made the Vryburg-Transvaal border his next field of operations. Just after the annexation of the Vryburg area by the Cape Government there was an election; and Scotty willingly agreed to nominate some impostor as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. The candidate wore the clothes of a predikant to impress the voters. Scotty, inspired by champagne, delivered a telling speech and secured the nomination. He then claimed £300, the sum agreed upon, and celebrated so wildly that he was thrown through a window. Scotty always said that the scar on his head was the result of a sabre wound received in India. The shattered glass at Vryburg was the real cause.

Scotty himself adopted a clerical disguise on one occasion when the police were after him. He escaped, but a genuine clergyman who bore some resemblance to Scotty was arrested on a train and kept handcuffed until the nearest rector arrived and identified him.

Towards the end of the "roaring 'eighties" there was a gold rush at Malmani in the Western

Transvaal. The late Mr. George Beet of Kimberley, a well-known business man, prospector and historian, set out for the gold fields on a beautiful thoroughbred English stallion which he had borrowed from a farmer named Piet Marais. In his belt Mr. Beet carried a hundred golden sovereigns. Thus equipped, he was dismayed when he met Scotty Smith on the same trail.

“Hullo, Mr. Beet, is that you?” greeted Scotty. “What a fine horse you have. Who is the owner?”

Mr. Beet said afterwards that Scotty’s first concern was always for the horse, not the rider. When he revealed the owner’s name Scotty said magnanimously: “I would not touch anything belonging to old Piet.” Nevertheless it was an uneasy ride for Mr. Beet.

Another prospector named Carter rode into Taungs, heard that Scotty was in the district, and asked the hotel-keeper whether his horses would be safe.

“It’s all right, no need to worry, Scotty has a better job on,” the hotel-keeper assured him.

Next morning Carter met a stranger outside the hotel and confided his fears to him.

“You’ll be all right - Scotty has struck gold and he won’t bother about your horses,” declared the stranger.

Later in the morning Carter discovered that the stranger was Scotty Smith himself. Scotty’s gold turned out to be unpayable, and he went back to his raiding.

Scotty was undoubtedly loyal to his friends, and often warned them to lock up their horses when his band of raiders was active. He also displayed a certain chivalry towards women. The tale is often told in South Africa of the poor widow, alone on a farm, who had heard that Scotty was in the neighbourhood and was terrified of him. Scotty called at the farm and was not recognised. The widow confided in him; and before leaving Scotty gave her a bag of money to educate her

children. "Never be afraid of Scotty Smith," he called back as he rode away.

I heard another story which I have been unable to confirm - Scotty's meeting with a farmer who complained of his drought losses and remarked: "I wish I could arrest that fellow Scotty Smith, for there is a price of £50 on his head and I could do with the money."

Scotty then revealed his identity and offered to accompany the farmer to the nearest police station. When the farmer refused, Scotty brought out his revolver and forced the man to "arrest" him. The farmer received the reward and Scotty escaped a few hours later. "I am always willing to help a poor man, however much I may be inconvenienced," Scotty is reported to have said afterwards.

Until he was an old man, Scotty never allowed civilisation to overtake him, and it was in the early 'nineties of last century that he moved into the "no man's land" of the Kalahari north of Upington. He squatted on a slice of country suit-

able for raising stolen cattle, and remained there for many years. One of his farms he named, in his royal way, King's Rest; the other was Leitland's Pan. At the age of forty-six he married a Miss van Niekerk, an Afrikaner girl of nineteen, and raised a family of two sons and five daughters.

Scotty's exploits during the South African War must have been remarkable, but he followed the tradition of all good secret agents and seldom spoke of his experiences. I do know that he was handsomely rewarded through the Upington magistrate. Major Lewis Hastings, the military commentator and Rhodesian M.P., met Scotty during shooting trips in the desert; and he states that Scotty received a free pardon from the British Government on account of his South African War services.

The end of the South African War did not finish Scotty's intelligence activities. For years afterwards he kept an eye on German military movements along the Kalahari frontier; and he followed every manoeuvre in the German-

Hottentot war, often crossing the border to take a hand in the game. Regularly he supplied the Hottentots with arms. Again and again he raided German camps and drove their cattle and mules over the border far his own profit.

Upington at this time had become the greatest market for livestock in South Africa. All the horse-dealers were there, and the Germans were buying up the endless cavalcades of horses, donkeys and mules that streamed up from railhead at Prieska.

Lieut.-Colonel H. F. Trew, a police officer who knew the Kalahari well in peace and war, declared that Scotty gathered several white men and a number of Hottentots round him at Leitland's Pan. These were the men who helped him in his forays into German territory - a formidable little army of desperadoes when Scotty had armed and trained them.

Trew said that Scotty's private army once led the Germans into a trap. Scotty and a few others galloped into a kloof with the Germans after

them; then the Hottentots opened fire. This incident resulted in a German official complaint to the Cape Government. Hastings confirmed the story of Scotty's efforts on behalf of the Hottentots, and pointed out that the native leaders, Simon Cooper and Marengo, continued their resistance for years owing to Scotty's help. He said the stolen cattle were sent from post to post along the Molopo to the markets at Vryburg and Kimberley. There the Germans had no option but to buy their own cattle back again, for the war depended on long columns of wheeled transport. Often the same branded cattle were stolen more than once. Everyone, even the Cape Mounted Police, sympathised with the Hottentots and winked at Scotty's daring raids.

Once Scotty fell into the hands of the Germans, and his wagon was confiscated. He remained a captive for just twelve hours; then he stole a horse, rejoined the Hottentots, and led an armed band back to his wagon. Scotty not only recaptured his own wagon, but also took six German wagons loaded with supplies. The

Germans put such a high price on his head after this exploit that Scotty found it advisable to remain on the safe side of the border.

One of the most sinister episodes in the career of Scotty Smith was the business of the Bushman skeletons. During a visit to London before 1914, Dr. Borchers noticed that the Bushman specimens in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons were inferior, and he offered to present better ones. On his return to Upington he commissioned Scotty to secure the genuine articles.

Shortly afterwards Scotty arrived at the doctor's house with ten complete skeletons. He explained that years before the Bushmen had raided his cattle; and following the lawless frontier custom he had shot the raiders and buried them in a sand dune. Thus he had been able to meet the demand without delay.

The skeletons were in an excellent state of preservation. Anatomists found that two were of pure-bred Bushmen while others revealed

Hottentot and Bechuana mixtures. They made a valuable addition to the famous museum, and out of this fact arose a grim sequel.

Other museums in America and on the Continent heard of these acquisitions, learnt the name and address of the collector, and sent orders for more. Professor Koch of Berlin was among the keen buyers. The usual price was £5 for a skull and £15 for a whole skeleton. While the demand lasted, Scotty did a roaring trade. He was often asked how he managed to find so many skeletons, and he had an explanation ready. "When I was an outlaw, the police used to send Bushman trackers after me," he declared. "So I shot them. Now I'm selling their bones."

Mr. H. Z. van der Merwe, a former Secretary for Education in the Union, once an inspector of schools in the North West Cape, spent forty days on the road with Scotty at this period, travelling by ox-wagon. He recalled that Scotty had a knack of appearing and disappearing. Mr. van der Merwe knew all about the skeleton trade, and said that the museums were not always sure

how Scotty had collected the specimens. Some were too fresh. It is clear that many of those Bushmen were neither raiders nor trackers.

Scotty, with his veterinary experience, was also something of a human anatomist. Mr. Harry Drew, the retired magistrate I mentioned previously, came to know Scotty well. Dr. Peringuey of the South African Museum asked Mr. Drew to secure some Bushmen skeletons for him. This was done with the aid of the Basters, but the skeletons arrived in a sack with the bones hopelessly jumbled. Scotty assembled the skeletons in the court room and announced that nothing was missing.

“I hope I don’t die up here, Scotty,” Mr. Drew remarked one day. “If I do, you’ll certainly ship my bones over to Europe and sell them to a museum.”

Mr. Drew told me that the Bushmen employed on Scotty’s farm kept their master informed of every scrap of news in the Kalahari. They used smoke signals, like the Australian aborigines,

and apparently this method was capable of conveying fairly intricate messages. One example which Mr. Drew quoted was of a police patrol from Upington led by Sub-Inspector Graves. The patrol had to call at Scotty’s farm because Scotty was suspected of selling liquor illicitly to the Basters. On arrival Scotty gave Graves a full description of the patrol’s journey. Although the Bushmen had never left the farm, they knew exactly where the patrol had split up and all the places the police had visited.

This primitive but effective “Kalahari radio” always baffled Mr. Drew, for the Basters were as well-informed as the Bushmen. Even on days when not a sign of smoke was to be seen on the horizon, news travelled fast over huge areas. Scotty Smith benefited from the weird intelligence system; but apart from the smoke signals he confessed that he had no idea how it was done. Scotty learnt one trick from the Bushmen, however, which must have saved him many a time. He could put his ear to a sand-dune and

pick up the noise of horses' hooves long distances away. And no one ever surprised him while he was asleep.

Mr. Drew was also able to throw some light on Scotty's activities during the German-Hottentot war. During a visit to Keetmanshoop a high German official tried to persuade Mr. Drew to put Scotty over the border.

"I'll guarantee that he will do no harm," said Mr. Drew.

"It's not what he will do, but what he has done," replied the German.

Mr. Drew explained that an extradition warrant would be necessary; otherwise he was not prepared to hand Scotty over. And that was the end of the matter.

Some years before, however, the Germans had almost succeeded in having their revenge on the old freebooter. Spangenberg the trader and Scotty both considered they had claims against the German Government, dating back to the early days, for farms in the Warmbad district.

They were invited to appear before a court in Warmbad and state their cases.

Although both men had guilty consciences they regarded the invitation as equivalent to a promise of safe-conduct. They rode to Warmbad together. That night a Scottish trader warned Scotty that the Germans intended to arrest him as soon as the case had been heard.

Spangenberg was sceptical and refused to leave. Scotty rode away during the early hours of the morning, followed by a German patrol of five mounted men. They came up with him near the border, shots were exchanged and two Germans lost their horses.

Long afterwards Mr. Drew asked Scotty whether there was any truth in this story.

"It's a damned lie - and besides the Germans fired first," was Scotty's reply.

Soon after Mr. Drew's arrival at Rietfontein in 1909, his horse became so ill that the police officer suggested shooting it. Scotty was called in and saved the horse. Mr. Drew had a high

regard both for the old man and for his veterinary skill.

Scotty once took out summonses against a number of Basters who owed him money. An aged Baster then approached the magistrate and said that he had been Scotty's companion on many hunting trips and other expeditions. "We have slept under one veld blanket, tightened our belts, known good and bad times together," declared the Baster. "Now I am old and bent, and I have only a few goats, and he wants to take them from me."

Mr. Drew sympathised with the Baster and promised to see what he could do. Scotty heard the Baster's tale and then tore up all the summonses. "I have been poor myself," he said. "I am not going to make things hard for other poor people."

One evening Mr. Drew invited Scotty into his house and offered him a tot of whisky. With an effort Scotty shook his head. "If I had one whisky I would not leave until I had finished

your bottle," he declared. "I'll stick to coffee." It took so long to replenish supplies at Rietfontein that Mr. Drew put away the precious bottle and sent for coffee.

I can imagine no greater contrast than that of Scotty Smith and Miss Dorothea Bleek travelling together for six weeks in the Kalahari. Miss Bleek, who died in Cape Town in June, 1948, at the age of eighty-one, was the world's leading authority on the Bushman language. Many years ago she set herself the task of completing the dictionary which her father started. In 1910 she trekked into the Southern Kalahari with Scotty, the old ruffian, as her guide.

Before the trek with Scotty, Miss Bleek had been working among the Bushmen of the Kenhardt district. She met Miss Wilman of the Kimberley Museum by arrangement at Upington, and they stayed at the magistrate's house until the wagon was ready. It was late in the season for Kalahari travelling, but these two determined women scientists were not dismayed by the heat. Early in October, they set off into the Kalahari with

Scotty, and his eldest daughter, a girl of about thirteen.

“We slept in the wagon, with Scotty underneath,” Miss Bleek told me. “Scotty kept the key of the water-tank, and we had our daily ration. Scotty, the boys and the oxen drank the water from the t’samma.”

They met the first Bushmen at Leitland’s Pan, Scotty’s farm on the Molopo. Among them was that famous character Abraham, who lived beyond the century mark and was seen by many thousands at the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg. Abraham belonged to the Gommanes clan, then more plentiful along the Nossob. From the farm the party trekked on to Ky Ky, where the Basters got into touch with more Bushmen.

Miss Bleek said that it was often difficult to follow Scotty’s speech. He had lost most of his teeth, and his accent was broad. He seemed to have had a good education with a smattering of science; but Miss Bleek thought he belonged to

the gamekeeper class rather than the aristocracy. His table manners, even in the desert, gave him away.

Scotty was not an authority on the Bushmen, according to Miss Bleek; but as her standard was the highest in the world in this respect it is possible that he was far from ignorant on the subject. He was adding to his income at this period by conducting scientists and others into the desert, and collecting various specimens (apart from skeletons) for museums.

One night Scotty explained how he had become Scotty Smith. He had arrived in South Africa as Gordon Lennox, and had joined an irregular unit under that name so that he could take part in one of the border wars. About the time when he was due for his discharge he got into some scrape which he did not consider worth mentioning. He had the papers of a comrade-in-arms named Smith, who had been killed. From that time he assumed the identity of Smith, and the Scotty was tacked on inevitably, because of his accent.

“I joined the army for a row, and I have been in a row ever since,” he told Miss Bleek without a note of regret in his voice.

Another of Scotty’s anecdotes was of a Boer War incident, when Lord Kitchener sent for him and instructed him to cross the Orange River into the Free State and find out what the enemy were doing.

Scotty explained that he had just returned from a long patrol and his horse was finished.

“Take one of my horses,” said Kitchener and turned away.

Just outside Kitchener’s tent was the most magnificent horse that Scotty, the horse-lover, had ever seen. It was beautifully groomed, and the saddle and bridle completed a wonderful picture. In a flash Scotty pushed the orderly aside and rode off.

Scotty was back next day with the required information. Kitchener’s A.D.C. looked at him queerly as he entered the tent, but said nothing.

Kitchener was pleased with Scotty’s report and said not a word about the horse.

“I can believe every word of it, for Scotty showed me an inscribed cruet which Kitchener gave him at the end of the South African War,” said Miss Bleek.

During the trek up the Nossob, Miss Bleek met a mysterious character known as “One Armed” Jetty. “He did not tell us what he was doing up there,” recalled Miss Bleek. “Probably he was up to no good - though he did supply us with some fresh venison.”

I heard more about Jetty from Dr. Borchers, but not enough to satisfy my curiosity. It appears that at one time Jetty was Scotty’s farming partner. “The relationship between these two men puzzled me deeply,” said the doctor. “It was obvious that they hated one another - and yet they were partners.”

Jetty had lost his arm in an encounter with a leopard but he was a crack shot before and afterwards. He told his story to Mr. Drew at

Rietfontein - a tragic story of a conviction for I.D.B, at Kimberley when he was owner of a flourishing bottle store and had no real desire to take part in the traffic. One uncut stone landed him on the Breakwater for five years. When Jetty returned to Kimberley his wife had died and he was treated as an outcast; so he headed for the Kalahari and linked up for a time with Scotty. It is impossible now to guess why the partners fell out. I think Scotty was always a lone wolf at heart, for no man lasted long in partnership with him.

“I’ve never put a man’s lights out for his horses,” Jetty declared to Mr. Drew. “Scotty Smith can’t say that.”

Miss Bleek described Scotty as a fine-looking old man with a long white beard. He was a massive man, over six feet in height; and until his old age the square, truculent jaw was covered with the red beard. “I suppose you could hardly call him honest - but he certainly carried out his undertaking faithfully to Miss Wilman and myself,” summed up Miss Bleek.

Scotty Smith’s last war opened in 1914. He followed every move made by Manie Maritz and his rebels; and once he crept up to the rebel camp and covered Maritz with his rifle. He was asked afterwards why he did not fire. “I have never yet shot a defenceless man in cold blood,” replied Scotty; and one can only hope that this proud boast was true. Dr. Borchers told me that Scotty went to the magistrate at Upington and declared that if the Union Government would take out a £20,000 insurance on his life he would bring in Maritz alive. Later in the campaign in German South-West Africa, I am assured, Scotty saved General Louis Botha from riding into a German ambush. Mr. Clement Handley of Port St. John, who was present, vouched for these details. Scotty with a squad of trusted Hottentots scouted ahead of the South African troops, his particular mission being to smell out people employed by the Germans as spies. General Botha often exposed himself recklessly; and one day near Windhoek he almost rode into a German patrol. Scotty, the old outlaw, hurried to the spot with

his men, fired on the Germans, and extricated the Prime Minister from a tight corner.

The vigour of Scotty Smith when nearing seventy was commented on by all who met him in the field. "To see the old chap spar with some of his pals proved him to be a tough nut to crack," remarked a soldier who rode into German South-West Africa with him. "The way he mounted his horse was wonderful seeing that he was sixty-eight years of age. He said he could not eat the army biscuits as they were, but had to grind them up in a coffee mill."

In his last years, after that campaign, Scotty lived on an "erf" in Upington, an irrigated plot beside the Orange River. The government had begun surveying the vast tract of the Gordonia district which lies in the Kalahari; and then it was discovered that Scotty had no title to the large ranching areas he had occupied. So the old rascal, respectable enough now, lived in the village with his family. He had a small house with a fine view of the river banks and the islands.

While I was being shown over this house I noticed that it had only one door, the front door. Dr. Borchers was able to explain this unusual arrangement. Scotty once said to the doctor: "When I am aged and paralysed I want to be able to see the young men who came to court my daughters - I won't have them slipping in and out of the back-door." The story is still told in Upington of a young police trooper who called at Scotty's homestead in the Kalahari on "official business." Scotty suspected that the trooper was after one of his daughters; and that night the trooper's horse vanished. It was never found.

There was no chemist nearer than Prieska, 146 miles up the river, before the 1914-1918 War. Dr. Borchers told me that Scotty had a well-stocked veterinary medicine chest; and the doctor often drew upon these drugs when his own supplies ran out. Some years after Scotty's death there was a sensational murder trial in Upington. It came out that the strychnine used

by the murderer had formed part of Scotty's outfit.

Scotty kept a diary of sorts, and after his death the family placed a high value on it and refused to allow anyone to read it. Mrs. Smith, I know, offered it to a Johannesburg newspaper for £10,000 - the price of a literary masterpiece indeed.

I learnt from several men who had glimpsed pages of the diary that it contained nothing in the way of a narrative. Mr. Drew once lost the horse that Scotty had cured, and asked Scotty whether he had any idea where it had strayed. Scotty consulted his diary and directed him to a farm where the horse was found. The priceless diary, I gather, was largely a record of horse-flesh - the absorbing passion of Scotty's strange life. The diary is now in Kenya, where Scotty's eldest son Gordon and a son-in-law settled some years ago.

One man who approached Scotty during his old age with an offer for his reminiscences, to be

published after his death, left this record of the reply: "I have never done any good to my people while alive, and I do not wish to do them any harm after my death."

Mr. George Beet, already mentioned, corresponded with Scotty up to the time of Scotty's death. Mr. Beet's analysis of the man's character was as accurate as any I have heard. "To my mind," he said, "Scotty was an anachronism, a reversion to type. He came of good old Scottish Border stock, and no doubt the more primitive instincts were derived from his hard-living, hard-fighting, cattle-lifting ancestors. The love of adventure and freedom was dominant in him, and he felt impelled to obey and observe the custom of the wilderness. Scotty lived as he pleased to live, and died a free man."

Several men who knew Scotty treasure photographs of him. The scene I like best reveals Scotty and his wife outside the Leitland's Pan farmhouse in the Kalahari. It is a simple dwelling of mud bricks, with a reed stoep. Scotty's sturdy ox-wagon is drawn up at the

door. Scotty is holding his rifle, and the picture is completed by several dogs and ostriches.

There in the Kalahari the old outlaw was indeed a free man. At a later period Scotty would probably have spent most of his life in gaol. He died in 1919 at the age of seventy-three, and the brass plate on his grave in Upington bears his real name - George St. Leger Gordon Lennox.

CHAPTER 8

UPINGTON AND THE RIVER

OLYVENHOUTSDRIFT it was in the days when only adventurers and missionaries passed that way. Now it is Upington, centre of enormous irrigation schemes, but still the Kalahari gateway, still with something of the outpost flavour in its broad streets above the Orange River.

Within living memory Upington consisted of a mission church, a store and the huts of the Basters who had settled there. That was in the early 'eighties of last century. The Basters were placed there under the leader Klaas Lukas as a "buffer colony" against Korana raiders. At first

the Rev. Christian Schroder, the Rhenish missionary, was the only white man in the area. As far back as 1871 Schroder realised the possibilities of the river soil and planned an irrigation canal. He was joined in this enterprise by a young trader, Japie Lutz, and in the early 'eighties these two honoured pioneers completed the work. Lutz was still living in Upington in 1948.

Japie Lutz also built the first proper dwelling house in Upington, when his brother Heinrich (a partner in the trading venture) needed a house for his bride. That was in 1882, and the white residence, a famous landmark in the town, was pulled down only a year or two ago. Frieda Lutz, the first white child at Olyvenhoutsdrift, was born in this house.

The next building was the Residency for a magistrate; the celebrated John Healy Scott was stationed there in 1883. Scott's territory ran from the Griqualand border to the Aughrabies Falls, and from the Orange River to the first Kalahari dunes - an enormous area, thirsty, lawless and unmapped. Scott, a versatile man, also acted as

doctor, blacksmith, carpenter, tinsmith and wagon-maker. For £100 he built a canal thirteen miles in length to irrigate his garden.

Schroder, of course, became the first superintendent of the Kakamas Labour Colony (in 1898), while Japie Lutz joined him there as canal builder.

The Orange River was bridged when the railway reached Upington in 1915, and the present railway bridge, almost a mile in length, is the longest in the Union. In the 'eighties of last 87 century, however, there was just a boat, and, not until 1890 was a pont service established. Again and again, even in recent years, Upington became isolated in times of flood.

It was in 1896, when the territory round Upington became part of the Cape Colony that the town was named in honour of Sir Thomas Upington. The district of Gordonia, more than 18,000 square miles in area (the largest district in the Union) was named after Sir Gordon Sprigg, and you will also find a tiny railway siding

called Sprigg to the south of Louisvale. Upington, however, has not forgotten its Afrikaner pioneers. Schroder Street is still the main thoroughfare, and Lutz Street is not far away.

In the days before the railway, Upington was in closer touch with South-West Africa than with the Union. Prieska, 150 miles away, was railhead; and it was a long and thirsty wagon trek to Upington. The Germans, as I have said, often visited Upington to purchase supplies during their war with the Hottentots, and as a result, German marks circulated more freely than pounds and shillings.

The first sale of Crown lands was held at Upington in 1895. Fortunate farmers bought 12,000 morgen at two shillings a morgen, and 22,000 morgen at one shilling a morgen. Even at these bargain prices twenty farms offered were not sold. Four years later, when the first irrigated land was sold by public auction, one block of twelve acres fetched £50 an acre. The price today would be about £1,000.

Today the lucerne that is railed from Upington is counted in millions of bales a year. Hundreds of tons of dried fruit, many thousands of bags of wheat and dried peas are sent away. On both sides of the river the karakul lamb is flourishing; three hundred thousand pelts are now sold every year.

Upington has seen something of all the border wars, raids and rebellions. As a gateway to the Kalahari, tales of desperate adventure still reach the town. It is often intolerably hot - 110 degrees in the merciless November days. But always there is the scent of the orange trees and the beauty of the river.

Upington is always conscious of the moods of the river, South Africa's greatest river, draining half the area of the Union, sometimes raging like an ocean, then dwindling to a trickle. Even in Europe there are only two rivers, the Volga and Danube, which are mightier than the Orange.

I have walked across the Orange River in a dry season from bank to bank, when the stark grey boulders of the river bed were exposed to the sun along my dusty path. And I have watched the full drama of the floods - one of Nature's contrasts, a scene I have never forgotten.

Behind me, one day in January, 1934, were the plains of Bushmanland, baked and stricken by years of drought. Across the river a storm of red dust came down from the scorching Kalahari. At my feet was the swirling river, tearing away the work and wealth of years. The river at Upington that day was a mile wide. In some places it spread out over four miles. The speed was estimated at six miles an hour - a dangerous speed if you happen to have been caught by the floods and are awaiting deliverance on a tree-top.

At such times warnings are flashed down the river for hundreds of miles. Whole villages turn out to gaze upon the crest of the flood while old hands gauge the depth and force of the waters. But the news does not always reach everyone in time.

I met a young man, Barend Engelbrecht, whose parents were cut off on Cannon Island during the 1934 floods. Engelbrecht took a log of wood, as the Hottentots do, and gave himself to the river. He drifted and swam for twenty miles, from Upington to Cannon Island, and reached his parents safely.

Two men of Kakamas named Wiets Botes and Gert Redman took me across the river in a crazy home-made boat while the floods were at their height. I have always been at home in boats, and I never imagined that the Orange River could become as perilous as the sea. But it was an alarming experience. I rowed over the submerged fields with them, sheltering from the force of the current in the lee of hedges, clinging to bushes while the oarsmen rested, plucking peaches from half drowned trees. We were aiming at the Kakamas railway bridge, and the whistle signs, jutting up from the torrent, were our navigation marks. When I reached the railway track at last, the ballast had been washed away; the metals and sleepers hung suspended

with the water rushing beneath and sometimes over them. I had to crawl from sleeper to sleeper, holding on to the rails. The bridge itself was only just above flood level. Trees and bushes were piling up against the supports, increasing the pressure through the gaps. I could feel the whole bridge quivering with the strain. But it held, and I crossed the flooded Orange. That was the only route over the river for hundreds of miles for those who had no aeroplanes. I believe the 1925 floods were higher than the maelstrom I saw. In that year, the river at many places rose thirty-seven feet above its normal level.

When was the greatest Orange River flood of all? I asked old men in many a settlement that question. One Kakamas farmer recalled the torrent of 1897 - the pioneers had arrived, but the water did not harm them for they had not yet started work. That is about as far as living memory goes; that is to say, along the river below Upington.

Nevertheless it is probable that the greatest flood during the past five hundred years occurred in

1790, when seeds of the “Kurru” thorn tree, previously unknown on the banks of the lower Orange, were brought down. This may be deduced from a conversation with Cornelis Kok, the Griqua chief, left on record by the missionary Campbell. The trees grew far up on the banks - a fairly reliable guide to what must have been a terrifying deluge.

By such rough guesswork, based on well-known floods near Colesberg or at Aliwal, the heights of other Orange River floods have been estimated. There is a Hottentot tradition that in 1840 the river was flooded for nearly five months - a state of affairs which would certainly not be relished by the present settlers. It is clear that in 1849, and again in 1861, there were serious floods. A ghastly drought followed the torrent of 1861, and a wagon known to have been lost while crossing a drift thirty years previously was found in the dry river bed. The following year a low river was succeeded by a sudden rush of water that ran, as the Hottentots said, “like a great sea.”

Every drama of the Orange River will be repeated with the inevitable weather cycle that takes heed only of centuries.

Those who know the islands of the Orange River do not long for island paradises in the Pacific. Here within the borders of the Union you can find beauty and prosperity between the river banks - dream islands with the richest soil in the world. Strange to say, there are still hundreds of islands without settlers.

If an island has a name, then you must apply to the nearest magistrate for a lease. No one will stop you from grazing your cattle on an island without a name. That is the rule of the river; and the farmers, especially in lonely parts, find the nameless islands extremely useful. Cattle are left untended there, and brought back to the veld when rain has fallen. Thus the islands recover their grass and reeds.

Most of the large islands are found between Upington and Kakamas. Even on this stretch, where there have been irrigation settlements all this century, some of these fruitful islands were not occupied until very recent years. Skanskop Island, for example, is close to the famous Kakamas colony; yet it is only nine years old. It produces lucerne and sultanas, grain, fruit and vegetables. And according to the latest figures, the average income of a Skanskop settler is £650 a year. Close by is Brakbos Island, where Mr. A. S. Brink, superintendent of Kakamas, has the finest farm on the river. He calls it "Sultana," for he was the sultana pioneer in these parts; his vines and oranges make it a show place even in this region of record crops.

Canon Island, twenty miles from Upington, is the most remarkable of all these island enterprises. When I first saw Cannon Island it was a green jungle nine miles long, four thousand acres in extent, rising from the chocolate-coloured waters of the river. In 1926 it was seized by fifty land-hungry men in defiance of

the settlement regulations. They worked unaided and refused to be ejected. Today their achievements have become an inspiration to farmers along the river.

The early settlers were trekboers, longing for a place where they could take root. They found Cannon Island, tore away the thick tangle of willows and wild olives, and discovered that the soil was good. They made a weir and an irrigation canal, dug furrows and dams, chopped trees and levelled the rough island fields for the first sowing. It was a magnificent enterprise, carried out illegally on Crown land.

So the law intervened after a time in the shape of a lone policeman who had orders to eject the settlers. The policeman was lifted off his horse, given a spade, and invited to join the colony. He reported to the magistrate at Upington and the magistrate visited Cannon Island.

The settlers listened patiently to the magistrate's warning, but they went on with their toil. It was summer, the temperature, warmed by hot

winds from the Kalahari, was over 100 degrees in the shade; but they rose at five each morning and worked on until darkness. They were so poor that they could not afford to hire coloured labourers. Crops of wheat and lucerne were reaped to feed themselves and their cattle. Never was there a more industrious band of “land pirates.”

Finally Mr. Piet Grobler, Minister of Lands in 1928, was persuaded to inspect the island. “Oom Piet” was astonished at the transformation of the river jungle into a prosperous settlement. He knew that hundreds of thousands of pounds had been spent by the Government in establishing irrigation settlements up and down the Orange River. Yet here were hundreds of people living without subsidies, without calling on the Government for a penny, but with every prospect of success.

After such efforts it would have been inhuman to turn the settlers away from the rich scene they had created, Mr. Grobler gave them the first of

their rights and a definite promise of title in the near future.

The settlers returned to work with fresh enthusiasm. They bought steel cable and timber and built the largest “pont” on the Orange River. No longer were rafts necessary for transporting their produce to the river bank. Comfortable thatched brick homes replaced the mud huts. Water-wheels ran in the gardens. The Government provided a proper school and a post office. Within a few years the indomitable, penniless settlers had carried out improvements estimated at £20,000. Moreover, their land was yielding the largest wheat and cotton crops per acre in the world.

Cannon Island survived the depression of the early nineteen thirties. Such men as these knew how to ward off starvation, however low prices might fall. Their goats and their own fruit, and vegetables kept them alive. They had vineyards and orange trees, olives, mealies, date palms, and meadows such as you will see nowhere else in South Africa.

Then, in 1934, came the most devastating floods in living memory. The Orange River roared down on Cannon Island. By this time the population had grown to about a thousand men, women and children. The long, narrow island was cut up by the torrent into a chain of islands where, on the high parts, the settlers lived like castaways and prayed for help. In some places they were forced to find refuge in trees. Hundreds gathered round the island church on the high ridge. There they made their fires and watched with stricken eyes the river swallowing their possessions. They sang hymns and awaited deliverance.

Help came from the sky. Day after day, aircraft of the South African Air Force cruised along the river with small parachutes and parcels of food. The pilots were so skilful that few of the precious packages of meal, sugar and coffee were lost in the river. Scores of lives were saved during the period when boats were unable to cross the raging river.

When the waters dropped, Cannon Island was a scene of desolation, and many of the settlers were homeless. Yet even the great flood could not destroy the courage of the people of this fertile island. They banded themselves together again, re-levelled the silt, and wisely left the old channels of the river open so that the next floods would not tear away their crops.

Cannon Island settlers were allowed to purchase their holdings in 1937. I know one man who paid £103 for his nine morgen; and he makes a steady £600 a year from this small irrigated farm. The island produces half a million bales of lucerne a year, eight thousand bags of wheat, huge quantities of vegetables. The old pont that the settlers built has gone; the Government supplied cement and the people built a modern bridge. Cannon Island has now been included in the great State irrigation area below the Buchberg weir. But the Cannon Island people have secured “home rule” and only settlers approved by their board of management may buy land on the island.

Probably the first white man to make a garden on one of these Orange River isles was Wikar, the runaway who deserted from the Dutch East India Company's service in Cape Town and roamed happily along the river for years. In his famous narrative he described how he sowed watermelon and pumpkin on an island in October, 1778. Returning in December he found everything growing beautifully.

Wikar also visited a Hottentot island paradise. Fine trees grew there, all decorated with the heads of rhino, buffalo and hippo as signs of the bravery of the hunters. Dagga, of course, had been sown. Delicious wild cucumbers grew everywhere. Cattle, sheep and goats were hidden there, secure from the Hottentot robber chiefs. The island was so remote that the people were startled at the sight of Wikar's white face. They had heard only vague rumours of the Dutch settlement at the Cape.

On some of the Orange River islands you can enjoy a primitive scene which has not changed since Wikar's day. A later traveller, A. A. Anderson, who was there in the 'sixties of last century, has left a vivid record of his Orange River odyssey.

Of all the restless characters who left wagon-tracks on the South African veld, few travelled more widely, and into wilder corners, than Andrew Arthur Anderson. It is just sixty years since he published his diaries under the title of "Twenty-five Years in a Wagon." No modern writer of "escape literature" longed to be away from civilisation more fervently than Anderson. He complained bitterly of the postman's knock and the shrieking of railway whistles "startling the seven senses of your poor bewildered brain, and other so-called civilising influences, keeping up a perpetual nervous excitement not conducive to health." That was back in 1860, before he started roving.

This Anderson, by the way, must not be confused with others of the same or similar name

who explored the country last century. William Anderson was a geologist in Natal and Zululand. Charles John Anderson, the great Swedish hunter, explored the Kalahari and South-West Africa, often crossing A. A. Anderson's trails.

A. A. Anderson was a magistrate stationed at Walvis Bay. He also described himself as a civil engineer. In 1860 he made up his mind to devote his career to opening up the unknown territory to the north of the Cape Colony; and apparently this life gripped him so much that he never did another day's professional work. Students of his diaries have sought to discover a secret motive for Anderson's ox-wagon treks. It is now believed that he was in the pay of the Cape Government all the time as a sort of political intelligence agent. At first Anderson gained experience by making a number of short journeys in Natal. Then he pushed on beyond the Drakensberg and came at last to the Orange River.

"To travel when you please, eat and drink when so inclined, hunt, fish, sketch, explore, read or

sleep, as the case may be, no laws to curb your actions, or conventional habits to be studied." Thus the restless Anderson summed up his philosophy. "This is freedom, liberty, independence, in the full sense of the word. With what greed I looked upon my probable isolation from the outer world, craving for this visit to the happy hunting ground."

He had a well-equipped wagon and fourteen trek-oxen and a horse. Three faithful Zulus accompanied him as driver, voorloper and cook. His armoury consisted of three rifles and plenty of gunpowder. As an observer of life and natural history in the wilderness Anderson left much valuable information. His work is unreliable when he tries to explain scientific problems, many of which are still controversial. For example, he declared that the Bushmen were really degraded Hottentots, shrunk to the size of dwarfs owing to under-nourishment. Some of his nature notes, however, are fascinating. He shot a white eagle with a wing span of ten feet. He

claimed to have taught a white-throated crow to speak a few words, like a parrot.

Anderson was plainly fascinated by the more remote stretches of the Orange River, the part below Upington, then the haunt of Hottentot and Korana chiefs, with Bushmen in the mountain fastnesses. He built a wicker-work boat, like a Welsh coracle, from willows; covered it with two raw bullock hides well sewn together and painted red. He made two seats, two paddles, a mast and a lug-sail. The seven-foot boat was shaped like an egg sliced lengthways. Ballasted with two hundred pounds of stones, the little craft behaved well. There was a fine breeze on the day of the launching, and Anderson claimed (rather boldly) that this was the first boat ever to sail on the Orange River. Bushmen and Koranas who watched this historic event shouted with delight as Anderson sailed away upstream.

It is clear that he had a great deal of fun out of his coracle while exploring the islands, sketching and fishing. Never was there any shortage of food for the pot; for the river banks were alive

with pheasant, partridge, guinea-fowl, wild duck and geese.

Once he sent his oxen to graze on an island while he repaired his wagons. A Griqua chief warned him that the river was coming down in flood. Herd boys were sent to bring off the oxen, but in the meantime the river rose fifteen feet. Men and cattle had to swim for it, and all landed safely a mile and a half below the island. Within two hours the water had risen thirty feet.

“So enjoyable was the life, the daily sail on the river, reading under the overhanging trees as the boat floated quietly with the gentle current; that I decided to waste three or four months on its banks,” wrote Anderson. “I wanted ample opportunity of indulging in this wild and free life. I was following the river down for three hundred miles, the boat fastened to the back of the wagon when trekking down by the river.”

Anderson certainly knew how to enjoy a life of leisure. He recorded at this lazy period that he

travelled each morning for a couple of hours. "That was our day's work."

Anderson explored Southern Africa from Natal to Walvis Bay, from Ovamboland to the lonely wastes of Bushmanland. He was away from civilisation far so long that on two occasions his death was reported to the Governor of the Cape. When he trekked in calmly with his wagon after an absence of three years, his friends received him like a ghost. He was the perfect escapist, for the years brought no disillusionment, and the wild places always drew him back. "A life in the desert, with all its drawbacks, is certainly most charming," wrote A. A. Anderson, "for there the mind can have unlimited action."

Farini, our old friend of the "lost city," found a Canadian settler on an island above the Aughrabies Falls as far back as 1885. His name was Frier, and the memory of this island pioneer is preserved at Friersdale, a flourishing irrigation scheme. Mrs. Frier, with the aid of Bushman and Korana servants, served Farini with a dinner which, he said, was "equal to anything that could

have been given at an English farmhouse." Everything had been produced on Frier's island - potatoes, cabbages, tomatoes, squash, and maize bread as light and white as wheaten bread.

It seems that Frier was a skilful architect, builder and farmer. The clay bricks in his house were properly moulded and burnt. His orchard supplied him with bananas, figs, peaches, cherries, apples and pears. Ducks swam in the sluits. He grew tobacco, and sold the twisted leaves to the Hottentots. A small canal irrigated a field of wheat. Thousands of rock pigeons nested in inaccessible cliffs above the river bank.

Frier had built a bridge of poles across the main river at one point, and had fields of maize and other crops on neighbouring islets. Grape vines climbed poles spanning deep and rapid torrents. Giant cabbages and huge Kaffir water-melons grew in his garden. Frier was a great believer in Hottentot medicines, and showed Farini a gum from a bush which cured fever. Farini says that Frier was a benevolent master. His achievement in this far corner of the world is all the more

remarkable when it is remembered that the Orange River at this period was still the haunt of lawless, uncivilised and often warlike tribes.

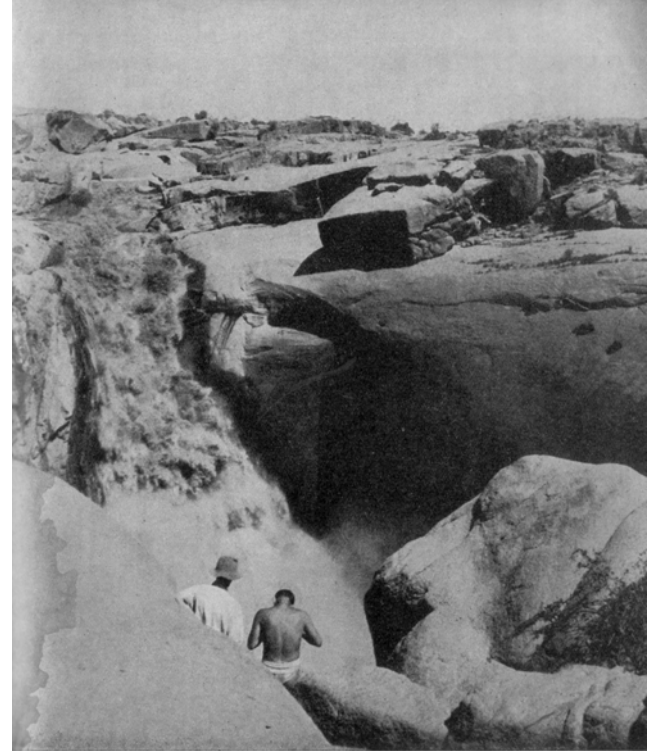
CHAPTER 9

AUGHRABIES

AUGHRABIES is the only waterfall in the world that means anything to me. As a rule, I find something ridiculous in the idea of travelling thousands of miles to watch a mass of water pouring over a precipice.

Once I met a frail, cultured, white-haired old man who spent his life visiting all the famous waterfalls and many unknown and inaccessible ones. He was Mr. Edward C. Rashleigh, and towards the end of his life he wrote a useful book on this unusual subject. But waterfalls have never cast a spell over me. I spent four hours at the Victoria Falls once, on the way down from Northern Rhodesia, and rejoined the train at Livingstone feeling satisfied that I had seen the whole show. Just water, moving water in tropical

surroundings. When I went to the United States



Aughrabies Falls from the north bank

it never entered my head to visit Niagara. Flying up and down Africa, various cascades were pointed out to me, along the Nile and elsewhere; but I cannot even remember their names. For some reason waterfalls do not inspire me as they did Mr. Rashleigh.

Nevertheless, I have something in common with Mr. Rashleigh. With all his experience, he placed Aughrabies almost at the top of the list of the world's greatest waterfalls. He could find only two others with larger volumes of water during the flood season; but apart from statistics he found something more. "The Aughrabies is not beautiful like the Victoria Falls," he wrote, "but it is terrible and intensely impressive; and the whole effect is heightened by the savage aspect of the canyon itself, whose walls, scarred and riven and sheer, seem to have been cleft asunder by some appalling lightning-stroke."

Many other visitors have been awed by the Aughrabies scene. I cannot say that I found anything sinister there; but I saw fine camping spots on the islands between the side-streams

and I decided that this was a stretch of unspoilt country where a fugitive from civilisation might discover the peace he was seeking. The Orange River has many wild and lonely reaches. This sudden drop at Aughrabies is the most fascinating of all.

Aughrabies is indeed a mighty and primitive scene. I suppose few South Africans realise that it is the highest waterfall in the world occurring on a great river. It has no bridge and no hotel; and as far as I am concerned you can leave it unchanged. Without amenities, Aughrabies makes the Victoria Falls look like some effect produced by an ambitious landscape gardener.

At the Victoria Falls you saunter out of the cocktail bar, follow the polite sign-posts, and secure your money's worth. But to reach Aughrabies you often have to swim for it. Mr. Rashleigh almost lost his life there. He was wading through the river above the falls when the current swept him away and carried him a hundred yards downstream. Keeping his wits about him, he clung to a rock. Mr. Ben Nel, his

guide, rescued him, but a valuable camera was lost in the struggle.

I nearly found myself in a similar predicament the first time I drove to Aughrabies. Carel Birkby, companion on many journeys in peace and in war, was with me. It was an Easter weekend, and I think we covered more miles during those few days than any one else in Cape Town. Someone at Kakamas put us on the wrong road, so Carel found himself taking his car up a flight of rocky steps on the way to Oberholzer's farm on the north bank. Many other travellers, I believe, have surmounted that notorious obstacle and several years passed before I discovered that there was another, easy route.

Oberholzer, a gaunt and genial man, brought up within sound of the falls, agreed to guide us. He seemed a little doubtful about the volume of water in the river; but we set off, waded through a side-stream, and then came to a fast-flowing river where Oberholzer advised us to take off all our clothes. He made a queer bundle of clothes and cameras, and fastened it to his head. It would

have looked funnier still if the roar of the falls had not become so loud and the river before us had not been running so fast.

Carel and I followed Oberholzer into the water until we were up to our chests and feeling the force of the current. Then Oberholzer turned slowly, because of the weight on his head - and spoke. "Ek weet ek kan dit doen - maar, kan jy?" "I know I can do it - but what about you?"

I looked at the distance to be swum, in the grip of the current, and I glanced at Carel. He would have followed; that I knew. But I also knew that Carel was a poor swimmer. All the time I was making up my mind, Aughrabies roared and the current whipped past us. And Oberholzer stood with his comic bundle awaiting our decision.

"No Carel - it's not worth it," I said, and we all turned back. Disappointing, perhaps, but I have seen many other great sights since that day in 1935 when I made that decision. I often think of it, and I am sure I was right. I had to wait

until 1939 before I set out again with Oberholzer and saw Aughrabies.

This time the water came no higher than my waist, and I reached the pleasant, wooded island which had seemed so dangerously inaccessible four years before. Another side stream was crossed by stepping stones; and from the second island I saw the famous Sonop Stroom - the stream that turns eastwards for a short distance, a direction, of course, which is opposite to the main course of the Orange River. This stream makes a small waterfall of its own about four hundred yards down the canyon.

Once over the Sonop Stroom you are among the tumbled boulders near the brink of the gorge. Unless you have a large scale map with you, the geography of the place is baffling. You have to remember that the river is split into a sort of delta above the falls, and that five streams run more or less parallel in the neighbourhood of the falls. One stream, washing the north bank of the river, refuses to join the

others at Aughrabies; it runs on alone for three miles before reaching the enormous rocks which turn it into the gorge. The number of waterfalls at the main scene depend on the water coming down the river. At long intervals not a drop goes over the edge. There may be one thin trickle; or dozens of torrents; or one stupendous cataclysm when the river is in full flood. But the dominating impression at Aughrabies is not one of falling water. It is the rock that remains vivid in the memory, the masses of black and grey granite, the steep rock walls of the canyon. Mile after mile of gigantic rock faces, washed and polished by the floods of centuries, naked, slippery, steep and deadly. There may be a rainbow over the falls, or the peculiar orange-coloured mist flung up by the muddy waters; but always your eyes return to the fantastic rocks and the immense rock faces.

Each high flood leaves its own marks on the dark walls of the canyon, white lines scored

one above the other as though Nature wished to record its moods and its past violence.

Some visitors have said that there is no life round Aughrabies. In fact, only the gorge is bare and empty. The islands and the river banks would hold a naturalist fascinated for weeks. Rare butterflies have been netted there. Baboons live in every krantz, monkeys thrive in the river jungle; you see wild duck on the water and leguaans on the rocks. Aughrabies is also the home of the platysaurus lizard, which is not found elsewhere.

In full flood, the rush of the Orange River over Aughrabies is far greater than the “cusecs” of the Victoria Falls and Niagara. “Cusecs,” by the way, means cubic feet per second. Mr. G. T. Ritchie, the irrigation engineer at Buchuberg on the Orange River during the 1925 floods, estimated the flow at 500,000 cusecs. (At dead low water in the winter it dwindles to 100 cusecs, a remarkable variation.) Niagara never produces more than 292,000 cusecs, while the Victoria Falls do not appear to have exceeded

140,000 cusecs during 1925, an exceptional year.

I do not think the height of Aughrabies has ever been accurately measured, but there is a drop of at least 480 feet. This means that Aughrabies is more than 130 feet higher than the Victoria Falls; while Niagara’s puny maximum drop of 175 feet need hardly be mentioned.

The great gorge of Aughrabies divides two farms, Waterval on the north bank and Rooipad on the south. Until 1910 the main waterfall was included in the Rooipad property. The late Mr. Piet Nel, owner of Rooipad, then sold the waterfall and part of the adjoining land to the Union Government for £9,000. I believe this is the only case on record in which a famous waterfall has been sold.

Nel had four sons - Piet, Bertus, Ben and Isak. They inherited 60,000 morgen of land on the south bank, and are still living there on their beautiful, irrigated farms. Ben Nel is the recognised authority on Aughrabies. He has

lived there all his life, except for a period when he went to Australia to become a wool expert; and he has made a number of dangerous descents into the canyon.

One climb Ben Nel made as a youth became so frightening that he had to close his eyes and hang on to the rock like a blind fly. Watched by his brothers, he went over the edge of the canyon with a rope. It was not long enough to take him down to the water, but he had gone so far that he doubted whether he had the strength to return.

First he let the rope go and tried to finish the descent unaided. Once he looked down and saw the water far below. At that point he became dizzy. He climbed down further with his eyes shut, and finally jumped the last forty feet into the deep pool two hundred yards below the falls. Then he swam and walked to a place where there is a fairly easy climb out of the canyon.

Not many other climbers have attempted the descent into the gorge near the falls since Farini's day. In 1935, however, Ben Nel

lowered an experienced mountaineer into the canyon at the end of a five-hundred foot Alpine rope; and on that day the first cinema pictures were taken of the falls from water level.

Nel had to do a grim climb in August, 1933. On a public holiday that month a picnic party camped at the falls. Mr. Dirk Poggenpoel, a general dealer, stood at the top of the falls and reached down to fill a cup with water. His mother and sister were watching him. As he stooped, his foot slipped and he vanished over the lip of the falls. Ben Nel went down to recover the body, climbing without a rope. A canvas canoe was lowered after him, with grappling tackle, and Nel dragged the pool for hours. He sounded the pool and found a depth of 140 feet; but there was no trace of the body. While climbing back, however, Nel decided to examine a large pot-hole, filled with water, which would normally have been hidden by the waterfall. The river was lower than it had been for years, and this made the search possible. Poggenpoel's body was found in the pot-hole.

He had been killed instantly by striking his head against the rock.

That was the only fatality at Aughrabies in recent years. The approach is dangerous, owing to the smooth, steep rack; but people are careful on the brink of the frightening chasm. I was told a story of a man who flung himself over the edge one moonlight night after an unhappy love affair. It happened long ago, and no one could give me details.

Up to 1925 no man, in all probability, had seen the Aughrabies in full flood. The falls are usually accessible from April to December each year; after that you have to swim, and swim well, to cross the side-streams. In March, 1925, Ben Nel's brother Bertus realised that some of his sheep had been cut off by the sudden arrival of the floods. He is a strong swimmer, and he saved his sheep by taking them to Klaas Island. By that time there were two miles of water between him and the farm Rooipad; so he decided to spend the night on the island.

The northern edge of Klaas Island provides the usual point of vantage for viewing the falls, and it occurred to Bertus Nel that the sight would be worth seeing. That night the flood reached its peak. At daybreak he watched the swollen Orange River tumbling into the gorge in one colossal wave. Not merely spray, but great masses of water were being flung on high. The great gorge was full almost to the brim. People nearly forty miles away reported that they heard the roar of the falls. Since then aircraft have flown over Aughrabies at flood seasons, and the scene has been photographed.

In the winter there is a pool, surrounded by boulders, just above the cataract where it is possible to swim safely. There are a number of these pools in the granite, scooped out by the swirling of the waters. Just above the falls, too, you can watch the river narrowing so that at one point a ten-foot plank would make a bridge. Here the river turns sharply before taking its plunge.

These are scenes which make the approach from the south bank worth while. One often hears the

rival merits of north and south bank discussed; but I think that both routes have much to offer the visitor. From the north bank you can see the whole waterfall and the pool below without risking an attack of dizziness.

Some years ago Parliament voted £4,000 for the construction of a footbridge above the falls. At present the visitor who wishes to travel from the south bank to the north must cover a total distance of more than forty miles and cross the river at Kakamas. The bridge, which would cut the distance down to a couple of miles, has never been built. Apparently the engineer responsible for the work designed a bridge which would have cost more than £4,000, so the whole scheme was abandoned.

A modest bridge, right out of sight above Aughrabies, would be an admirable project. But I sincerely hope the great gorge will never be despoiled of its grandeur by a steel bridge over the canyon, like the railway bridge at the Victoria Falls. It is possible to carry amenities too far.

The diamond fever that never dies out in South Africa has led several expeditions to Aughrabies. It is argued that as the Orange River has carried diamonds to its mouth, thousands of valuable stones must have remained trapped in the pool below the falls. The theory has been tested without success. Possibly a well-equipped diver might have more luck. Those who sounded the pool with greased lead-lines brought up nothing but worthless pebbles. Amethysts and water opals have been found in the gravel above the falls - but never a diamond. Yet the hopeful prospectors still arrive, by the carload and even by air.

Undoubtedly the first white man to set eyes on the Aughrabies Falls was Hendrik Jacob Wikar, a deserter from the Dutch East India Company's service. This runaway soldier was an intelligent Swede. His salary was nine gulden a month; he failed to pay his gambling debts; and when he was publicly insulted in the streets of Cape Town he decided to escape into the unknown country to the north.

Playing cards with only nine gulden behind you is a deplorable mistake to make. Wikar retrieved his reputation by making a name for himself as an explorer. Between April, 1775, and July, 1779, he roamed the Orange River and noted all he saw in a journal which still forms a gripping narrative if you know the wild country where he spent his years of exile.

Wikar drew a map with the Great Falls on it. He did not receive credit in the history books for his discovery because his journal lay almost forgotten in the archives for more than a century. It appeared in print for the first time in 1916, and this fascinating narrative was not translated into English until 1935, when the Van Riebeeck Society brought it out admirably in book form.

In the meantime a Cape Town merchant named George Thompson put the Great Falls of the Orange River into every school atlas. I do not wish to belittle Thompson in any way, for he was an enterprising and intelligent literary traveller. His book, *Travels and Adventure in*

Southern Africa, was one of the most accurate and informative works of its kind to appear in the first half of last century. But the fugitive Wikar discovered the Falls in September, 1778, whereas it was not until August, 1824, that Thompson visited the weird scene.

Very much in the same way David Livingstone placed the Victoria Falls on the map fifteen years after the voortrekker, Carolus Trichardt, carved his initials on a baobab tree in the vicinity.

Now here is Wikar's own description of the Falls, taken from his journal: "There is a tremendously big waterfall which can be seen in the dry season when the weather is clear, like smoke from a fire, at a distance of one stage and even further. It seemed to me as if the whole river was tumbling down from a rocky krantz twice as high as the castle ... but when I passed it in May (1779), in the rainy season, and observed it more closely, I saw that the spray did not rise as high as it had done in the dry season in bright clear weather, and it also

depends greatly on whether the river is full or not.

“When the weather is favourable one can hear the noise like the roar of the sea from a distance of one stage away; and half an hour above this waterfall the current is very strong, for the Namnykoa tell me that when by accident the hippos get into the current they cannot battle against it and are carried down the cataract, breaking their backbones, and they are then hauled out by the Hottentots. Some years ago they were driving a herd of cattle through the river about half an hour above the waterfall, when quite half were carried down and perished at the waterfall.”

The next European to reach this neighbourhood, only thirty-five years after Wikar, was the missionary, the Rev. John Campbell. He had been sent to the Cape by the London Missionary Society to visit their missions in the wilds. In

September, 1813, the natives told him there was a great waterfall on the Orange River; but none of them had seen it.

“Several had seen the mist arising from it, but the sound had so terrified them they were afraid to approach it,” remarked Campbell. “After a search of several hours no waterfall was either seen or heard.”

Five years later came the Rev. Robert Moffat, Livingstone’s father-in-law, trekking from Namaqualand to Griquatown. He wandered from his outspan at noon one day in the direction of the noise of the falls. Evidently he was no Livingstone, for this is what happened to him: -

“Feeling excessively tired, I sat down under the shadow of a bush and was soon fast asleep.” (His followers awakened him, and hearing the roaring of lions he left the spot and pushed on towards the next bend in the river.) “One of these we reached at a late hour, and it being very dark, and the banks precipitous, we heard the water murmuring below, but dared not go down,

fearing a plunge and the company of the hippopotami.”

George Thompson was a more determined explorer. I do not know what real motive impelled Thompson to trek away into the wilderness, but he gave out that he was going to investigate prospects for settlers. Thompson had one other claim to fame. He was Cape Town’s first cigarette smoker, rolling his own cigarettes “Portuguese fashion” several decades before the rest of the male community gave up their pipes. On the way to the Orange River on horseback, Thompson often went thirsty; and near the falls he spent four hungry days. He was about to shoot one of the horses when the Korannas killed a zebra. Thompson picked the ribs gladly; and thankfully he drank the river water after tasting the briny wells of Bushmanland. The zebra flesh, he recorded, was “sweet and good.”

Thompson claimed, rightly I think, to have reached the banks of the river by a route never taken by any previous white traveller. One morning he breakfasted on the zebra’s head,

which had been buried all night in hot embers, and then the Korannas guided him on foot to the falls.

It was a walk of about eight miles, and the rush of water sounded like distant thunder. First he had to cross the southern branch of the river; then there was an island covered with rocks and thickets and dense forests of kameeldoorn. At last, with the thundering sound of the cataract becoming louder at every step, he reached a ridge of rocks. Here is Thompson’s own description of the scene:-

“It seemed as if we were now entering the untrodden vestibule of one of Nature’s most sublime temples; and the untutored savages who guided us, evinced by the awe with which they trod, that they were not altogether uninfluenced by the *genius loci*. They repeatedly requested me to follow them softly, for the precipices were dangerous for the feet of men - and the sight and sound of the cataract were so fearful, that they themselves regarded the place with awe, and ventured but seldom to visit it. At length the

whole of them halted, and desired me to do the same. One of them stepped forward to the brink of the precipice, and having looked cautiously over, beckoned me to advance. I did so, and witnessed a curious and striking scene, but it was not yet the waterfall. It was a rapid formed by almost the whole volume of the river, compressed into a narrow channel of not more than fifty yards in breadth, when it descended at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees, and rushing tumultuously through a black and crooked chasm among the rocks, of frightful depths, escaped in a torrent of foam."

The Korannas informed Thompson that this was not the main waterfall. They led him for another mile along the rocks, warning him constantly to watch his feet. One false step would have been fatal.

"At length we halted as before," went on Thompson, "and the next moment I was led to a projecting rock, where a scene burst upon me far surpassing my most sanguine expectations. The whole water of the river (except that which

escapes by the subsidiary channel we had crossed, and by a similar one on the north side) being previously confined to a bed of scarcely one hundred feet in breadth, descends at once in a magnificent cascade of fully four hundred feet in height. I stood upon a cliff nearly level with the top of the fall, and directly in front of it. The beams of the evening sun fell full upon the cascade and occasioned a most splendid rainbow; while the vapoury mists arising from the broken waters, the bright green woods which hung from the surrounding cliffs, the astounding roar of the waterfall, and the tumultuous boiling and whirling of the stream below, striving to escape along its deep, dark and narrow path, formed altogether a combination of beauty and grandeur, such as I never before witnessed."

Thompson moved to another spot to gain a closer view. Suddenly the Korannas grasped him, and for a moment he thought they were going to throw him over the precipice. However, they were merely anxious to keep him clear of danger. "I was not ungrateful for their care,

though somewhat annoyed by their officiousness," added Thompson.

After sketching the scene and admiring the wild grandeur again, Thompson named the falls King George's Cataract "in honour of our gracious Sovereign." Although this name still appears on some maps, it never came into common usage. The earliest name has clung to the falls. First spelt "Aukoerebis," it is derived from the Nama word, click-oukurubes, the "noisemaking place." Groot Waterval, as the first Afrikaners in the neighbourhood called it, is heard today as often as Aughrabies.

Next on the scene to leave a record of his visits was the surveyor Moffat, a son of the missionary. Sir George Grey, the Governor, sent him there in 1856, and Moffat wrote his impressions with scientific precision.

"The waterfall is a grand object, and must be grander still with a full river," said Moffat. "I did

not know whether to consider the fall itself with the beautiful cascade on its left and the grand boss on the right, or the deep chasms below, with parallel and precipitous walls and the apparently insignificant stream meandering there, the grander object. The sides of the chasm, and the appearance of a group of black conical hills of greenstone about five miles below, on the left bank, testify that a fissure must have existed in which the broad waters of the river found a vent, and that that rock was the subterranean disturbing agent which formed it."

The last "early visitor" arrived in 1885, and made the first detailed map of the falls; while his son took the first photographs. He was our friend G. A. Farini of the "lost city," and I think he could fairly claim to have been the first man to climb down into the gorge and come up alive.

Farini heard about the falls when he was in the Kalahari. A sheep farmer named Harper, living near Aughrabies, told him that only one man, a Hottentot, had ever gone into that grim canyon, and he had never returned. The bold Farini made

a raft of willow logs lashed with ox-hides to carry the camera equipment. Guided by the roar of falling water, he and his party crossed the side-streams in safety and came to the brink of the precipice on the north bank. There they joined all their ox-riems and ropes until they had a strong line four hundred feet in length. With this aid, Farini and his son made a number of daring descents and secured their photographs.

The river was rising during this visit, and often Farini had to swim the side-streams with a rope, hauling the others across as they clung to the raft. One difficult trip brought them to the end of the Aughrabies gorge, forty yards above the main river. They passed beneath small waterfalls, discovering new wonders every day. One spot the modest Farini named Farini Falls, and another Farini Towers. At every turn fresh cascades sprang out of the rocks.

Thus several days passed happily as they explored the gorge, and shot pheasant and rock-pigeons for the pot. They watched the floods

growing in volume and listened to the booming of the drift-wood bumping over huge boulders.

Once they were cut off. Their route had taken them over a water-worn boulder; and when they returned it was submerged. The German trader accompanying them said the water would rise for twelve hours after the first heavy rush; but that it might be three or four days before the water went down.

“We could see by the water-marks on the rocks, and by the wisps of straw and rubbish still hanging an the tree-tops, that the flood was a comparatively small one,” wrote Farini. “The trader told us that at Upington in the rainy season he had seen the river rise fifty feet in twelve hours, covering the highest trees that grew on the islands.”

Farini and his party camped an a flat rock, collected logs brought down by the river and coaxed them until they had a fire. The trader shot a baboon which they roasted and ate for breakfast. They were forced to spend another

night an this refuge, by which time there was nothing left of the baboon. Then, with the river falling, they made a perilous journey back to camp.

A farmer in the neighbourhood pointed out a place called Bushman Precipice on the south bank just below the main waterfall. There, he said, once lived a Boer who was always losing his sheep and goats and blaming it on the hyenas. One night he kept watch, and found that Bushmen were responsible for his losses. He chased them towards the falls, firing as he ran. It was low river, and the Bushmen crossed the outer chasms. In their terror, however, they ran headlong over the precipice - Bushman's Precipice.

Farini counted, named and mapped nearly a hundred distinct cascades extending along the whole sixteen miles of the Aughrabies gorge. Besides honouring himself in this way, he found a Gorilla Rock, a Book Rock, Hercules Falls (after Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor of the Cape Colony); and a gorge which he named

Scott Gorge, Mr. John Scott being resident commissioner of Korannaland at the time. Farini also took the liberty of finding a new name for the Aughrabies as a whole -the "Hundred Falls." I do not think one of Farini's names is still used.

Nevertheless, it was a daring survey that Farini made. One day, perhaps, some of his names will be revived and official recognition given to the first man to take a camera into the canyon. Farini departed to hunt the hippo further down the river. I think Farini Falls and Farini Towers, at least, should find their way on to modern maps of the area.

The man who has seen the Aughrabies Falls most often this century, I suppose, is the ragged, wizened Hottentot guide who led me to the brink from the south bank. I asked him for his impressions of the memorable scene.

"I do not think about it at all," replied the Hottentot, lighting a cigarette I had given him. "I think people are mad to come here."

CHAPTER 10

THE LONELY RIVER

YOU WHO HAVE only crossed the Orange River by train have no idea of the unknown river, the river of adventure that flows below the Aughrabies Falls.

These last bends and loops in the great trench, the last four hundred miles between the falls and the sea; these are the far corners where the march of the centuries has left few signs. Here are the most isolated people, the weird canyons, the parts so lonely that even the prospectors have not yet scratched the rocks.

Along these river banks, too, are the diamond terraces, the gold reefs and beryl and scheelite deposits, the copper mines abandoned after years of toil. This is the Orange River of sun and solitude, where people stagger under the dead weight of the summer heat. There is nothing in Africa to match the furnace of this valley at noon. Yet it is a river of rare dawns and bright moonlights; and I am thankful that I have slept

beside it in the open and seen the first amber light upon the water, and felt the wind coming as hot on the face as the breath of a leopard. This is the wild river, the land of odd and reckless characters. Life has often been dangerous here; but life can be good, too, you can relish your food and your drinks, the wild duck you shot and the beer you have cooled in the canvas water bag.

Below the falls there are no more irrigation settlements on the grand scale. Nearly everywhere the river runs to waste. Mr. A. D. Lewis, the former director of irrigation, expressed this disastrous fact in a memorable report:-

“There can hardly be a true South African, and certainly no irrigation engineer, with soul so dead that he can contemplate our greatest river tearing down to the ocean through a vast area of country which is thirsting for water, without feeling that same great effort should be made to design and carry out irrigation works for the Orange River which would rival those famous

works of other great rivers of the world - Ganges, Indus, Nile, Colorado.”

Mr. Lewis pointed out, however, that the low-water flow of the Orange comes from the high Drakensberg country, where there is no permanent snow on the mountains of the headwaters. Thus in the critical spring months the river dwindles. “The Orange tears steeply down in a rocky valley,” emphasised Mr. Lewis. “It has always been a powerful eroder, never a builder of lands.” The alluvial soil consists of narrow patches and strips, or islands which are swamped by floods.

There is enough water in the Orange to irrigate a million acres, but no way has yet been found of taking out furrows large enough to transform Bushmanland into a garden. Only here and there do you find small areas where the levels and the soil are favourable.

One successful small scheme which I visited is at Onseepkans, about thirty miles north of Pofadder. It was called Orangeville when the

enterprise started in 1916; but the settlers preferred the old Hottentot name, meaning “the drinking place for cattle.”

Japie Lutz of Upington, that redoubtable planner of furrows, took a hand in the work. Now there are about sixty plot-holders (each man with about six morgen), and the settlement runs along the valley for seven miles. Mr. L. J. Collyer, the village storekeeper, formerly a member of the Cape Mounted Police, told me about the prosperity of Onseepkans.

“Our oranges can compete in any market in the world,” declared Mr. Collyer. Between the wars, Onseepkans sent its navel oranges direct to England. All the tropical fruits grow well there, especially paw-paws and bananas. Wheat and melons are important crops; peas and table-grapes flourish. You get two crops of peas a year in the river silt, and in a good year a settler can make a few acres yield a profit of £1,000 after paying all expenses.

An aged Hottentot entered the store while Mr. Collyer was praising the fertility of Onseepkans. He wanted a bottle of buchu essence, favourite country remedy for pain and cramp in the stomach. Mr. Collyer keeps a register, however, and rations out this strong medicine. It contains a high percentage of alcohol.

Onseepkans, remote though it is, ranks as an official "port of entry" from South-West Africa into the Union. You can have your car taken across the river in a rusty iron boat, a precarious voyage at the best of times. The people want a bridge, and they even talk hopefully of a railway line that will cross the river at Onseepkans and bring Windhoek nearly four hundred miles closer to Cape Town. At present the farm produce goes ninety-five miles by road to rail-head at Kakamas. Mr. Collyer knows the tracks through Bushmanland, however, and drives from Onseepkans to Cape Town, 440 miles, in a day.

During great floods the water comes almost to the door of Mr. Collyer's store: The last time that happened was in 1924, a year after he had settled

at Onseepkans. As a contrast, the river dried up in 1945, and left some of the fish to decompose too close for Mr. Collyer's comfort. There had been no rain worth mentioning for six years at the time of my visit; but fortunately Onseepkans does not depend on rain. The summer heat is the dry 120 degree heat of the Orange River valley; but Onseepkans is healthy in spite of it. If anyone needs a doctor urgently, it means a telephone call to Kenhardt, 160 miles away.

Like most of the settlements in the Orange River canyon, Onseepkans has a dramatic approach. I remember a forest of kokerbooms in the sand; the koppies piled loosely with sun baked stones; the steenbok that stood on a rock to see the car pass; and then the school and buildings of the Roman Catholic mission beside the river.

Onseepkans makes a pleasant picture indeed in the memory. Mr. Collyer putting crushed peach stones into a ten gallon cask to clear the silt-laden river water for drinking. Glossy black karakul skins drying on their frames. The fragrance of grapefruit orchards and the restful

stretches of lucerne. Here at least the river does not run to waste.

Most daring of all Orange River irrigation efforts are the “one man” schemes to capture enough of the rushing waters to cultivate small patches of desert. One such place is Abbassas, not far to the east of Goodhouse, though a long detour has to be made from the main road to reach it.

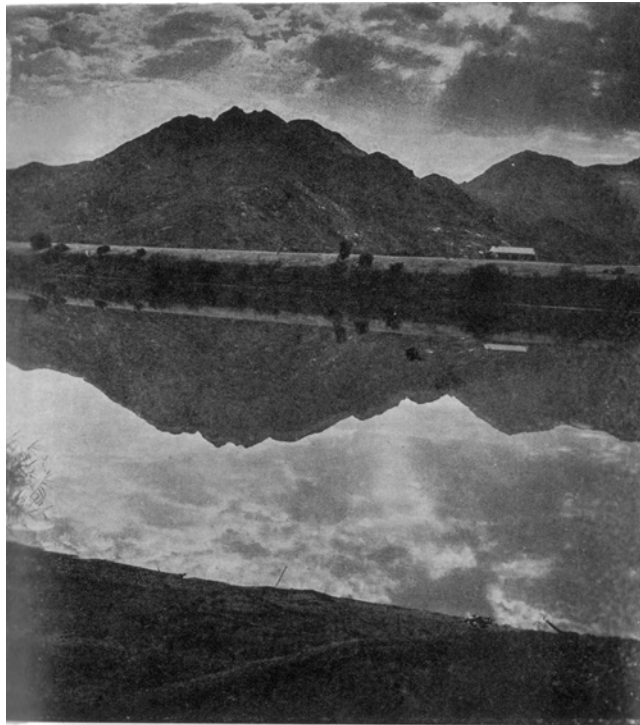
Mr. H. J. C. Krapohl, the surveyor who was at work in Bushmanland forty years ago, retired to Abbassas. I am told that he selected the place for health reasons; a wise choice, for he was still alive at the age of eighty-nine when I last heard of him.

It is intensely hot at Abbassas. No rain fell there between the years 1925 and 1932. Nevertheless, Krapohl lived at Abbassas for nearly thirty years. He busied himself with wagon-making, an occupation he preferred to surveying. Krapohl was a famous botanist, and many succulents bear

his name. He also grew dates, which are only now being planted on a large scale along the Orange River.

The author Rider Haggard is credited with introducing the date palm to the dry districts bordering the river. Roman Catholic missionaries were the first to adopt the idea, and there are many fine date palms at Pella and other missions.

One flourishing grove of palms not far from Abbassas owes its origin to a small military detachment stationed on the frontier at the outbreak of the 1914-1918 War. A soldier received a packet of dates in a Christmas parcel. He threw the stones away, and left to posterity a legacy of fruit and shade of which he is probably unaware. Eighty trees now yield an annual crop of two tons.



The Orange River at Goodhouse

Weidner of Goodhouse - if you have never heard those names coupled then you know nothing of the Orange River.

But now, I hope, you have realised that this journey is something more than a search for adventure along the frontier. To find people in a desert is not enough. I want to know how men live on happily in isolation year after year. The life of Weidner of Goodhouse is the key to something elusive which, all too often, is apt to vanish in shimmering waves of heat.

Goodhouse is one of those places which always makes me wish I could find leisure to take up painting. In the evening light there is a contrast between the hot mountains, the sand, the sun-scorched rocks and the river greenery, a scene that has never been put on canvas. I should like to be the first to paint the spirit of Goodhouse, a picture which would be far more than a landscape. And if I had the brush of a Neville Lewis I would persuade Mr. Carl Weidner to sit for a portrait. Those two pictures would decorate the walls of my country cottage and

inspire me on empty days; for I have always found at Goodhouse something which is missing in the largest cities.

Weidner of Goodhouse is not physically an heroic figure, but he lives up to his motto. *Alis Volat Propiis* – “on his own wings he flies.” Seventy-eight when last I called on him; and still working and planning for the future. One of the strongest characters I have ever met; hospitable to a degree, infinitely resourceful, and as original in his own way of thinking as George Bernard Shaw. A visionary who has spent most of his life with burning deserts all round him. If you passed through Goodhouse with only a glance at this short, rotund man with the benevolent face, then you were a victim of your own stupid haste and you lost an experience.

He was born at Berncastler on the Moselle, and even as a schoolboy his palate had developed so that he was called into the cellars to taste the famous Berncastler Doktor. In his youth he moved into Belgium and found his first job at the

Antwerp Town Hall. It had something to do with draining the polders, the low country reclaimed from the sea; and young Weidner sailed the Scheldt happily in a small boat, opening and closing the drains at the right moments. This work taught him the elements of irrigation, which later played a great part in his career.

Next he was offered work in a completely waterless place, the newly-founded German settlement of Angra Pequena in South-West Africa. He built the first four solid houses there in 1893. Already the independent character of the man was taking shape. He fell out with a Prussian officer and was, as he told me himself, “forcibly removed.” Weidner set out into the interior in an ox-wagon with two German scientists, a botanist and a geologist. He saw Lake Ngami, “a mere puddle,” and also outspanned for the first time beside the Orange River at a drift which the Hottentots called Gu-daos, the “sheep ford.” Both the scientists died of fever on this journey. Weidner proofed himself with rum and survived.

Gu-daos has been changed to Goodhouse on all maps. You drive through kloof after kloof, always in the sand tracks, and at last there is Goodhouse ... and Weidner. Not so long ago the motor journey was an ordeal.

Northbound, you had to climb a hill called Kooisabees, a hill of red sand where the sun flayed you in summer and the heavy sand threatened to bring an end to your motoring. One moment's hesitation was fatal. You had to grind through it, painfully, using an instinct that is higher than skill. Or else you stuck in the sand on Kooisabees hill and hoped that one of Mr. Weidner's trucks would come and pull you out.

Southbound, there was the dead valley of the Aub River, which may flow once in a quarter of a century. Here, too, in the days before balloon tyres it was fatal to slow down. The radiator boiled and you had to let it boil.

Between these two deserts lives Weidner ... and loves it. But it was years after the ill-fated journey that he settled there. He was in Cape

Town, taking out options on the Cape Flats and planning to build a canal linking Salt River with False Bay. After that he went ostrich farming at Oudtshoorn; and as a diversion he agreed to edit the *Mossel Bay Advertiser*. For two years he brought out the newspaper every week, dashing away from his farm on a motor-cycle, hurrying back to clip the ostrich feathers.

The old settled districts could not hold Carl Weidner for long. In 1910 he was back on the Orange River, looking for farms where ostriches would flourish. He went to London, raised £119,000 for the venture, and bought farms along the river for the company - including Goodhouse. On the north bank of the river, opposite Goodhouse, he bought a farm called Haakiesdoorn from a firm called South African Territories Ltd. The agent who sold him the farm was a man with short-cropped hair, bristling moustache and spectacles. His name was Alexander Scotland, and he looked exactly like a German. In fact he was the famous British intelligence officer who served for years in the

German Army, joined the German General Staff during the 1914-1918 War; and was smuggled into Germany again in 1939 to resume his perilous occupation - again on the German General Staff. You may remember that Scotland gave evidence at the trial of Kesselring in Venice. Scotland, by the way, is a nephew of George Bernard Shaw.

Weidner, of course, knew nothing of all this until recently. Weidner deplores all wars, and holds aloof from all such human folly in the splendid isolation of Goodhouse.

As a financier before the 1914-1918 War, Weidner was almost a success. He returned to Luderitz (his Prussian enemy having departed) and secured a whaling concession. Then he went to Germany to find capital; for it was laid down that the whaling company must be German. He interviewed Ballin, the shipping magnate, friend of the Kaiser; and even reached Solf, the German Colonial Secretary. Again the money was forthcoming - £50,000 for whaling along the coast of South-West Africa. Germany needed

whale oil to convert into explosives. The company declared a fifteen per cent dividend on the first year's working. In 1913 Weidner settled at Goodhouse to develop the ostrich and citrus farms on behalf of the London company. He looked like becoming a millionaire.

"War came and finished my career as a company promoter," Weidner told me with his philosophic laugh. "The whalers were seized by the British Government-and the market for ostrich feathers collapsed. I had £8,000 due to me from the whaling, and in the end I got £284. The war anchored me firmly in the desert at Goodhouse."

Then he revealed one of his secrets, one which has a wide application. "If you live in a desert there is only one thing to do," declared Weidner. "You must turn it into an oasis."

Misfortunes with money he dismissed lightly. "What is lost is lost. As long as I have enough I do not care. And what lovely times I have had ..."

I had known Weidner (and his beer-cooling apparatus) for a long time before he revealed another phase in his character. After the 1894 wagon trek, it seems, he sat down one day and worked out the amount of alcohol he had consumed in his life. Still in his twenties, he estimated that he had taken as much as an ordinary man would drink in twenty years. So for the next twenty years, until 1914, he remained a teetotaler. Having worked off these liquid arrears he poured himself out a glass of beer; and he still enjoys his moderate daily allowance.

It was in April, 1913, that Weidner settled down to create his oasis at Goodhouse. He had to take everything with him. Before leaving Cape Town he bought harness; at Paarl he found a cape cart, and he selected the horses at Klapmuts. Elsewhere on the road he bought a market cart, Clanwilliam provided more horses, and at Van Rhynsdorp he added a wagon and mules to his cavalcade. Weidner's trek to Goodhouse gave work to many a furrier and put money into the

pockets of wayside farmers with forage to sell. After weeks on the road he reached the river bank and made his home there. Goodhouse gave him complete happiness for many, many years.

He brought up the river water with a crude oil pump, and soon had more than a hundred morgen under irrigation - a hundred morgen of orange and grape-fruit trees, vines, paw paws, mangoes. The government would not build a road to Goodhouse, so Weidner cut his own track and sign-posted it. When prices of everyday commodities rose after the 1914-1918 War, he opened a store on his farm and sold the necessities to his labourers at pre-war prices. Abraham Morris, the Hottentot leader, was among his workmen.

Not long after his arrival he built the pont which has carried so many thousands of travellers over the Orange River. One day the pont sank, and an angry motorist stormed into Weidner's homestead.

“How far did you get before it sank?” inquired Weidner politely.

“Midstream - my car’s in the middle of the river,” raved the motorist.

“Ah, midstream,” exclaimed Weidner. “Then I’ll tell you what - you pay only half price.”

Weidner has his own eccentric sense of humour. He loved political discussions, and corresponded with many politicians. General Hertzog alone he regarded with admiration, and they exchanged Christmas cards for years.

There was once a Minister of Mines for whom Weidner had nothing but contempt. After some difference of opinion over prospecting rights, Weidner wrote a letter in which he compared the offending minister with a baboon. The minister’s secretary replied, pointing out that the phrase was objectionable. Weidner retaliated by giving a pet baboon the name of the Minister of Mines. For months visitors heard the story, and then Weidner would shout the

name and the baboon would come leaping out of its box.

A former Governor-General of the Union visited the Warmbad district of South-West Africa, territory of the Bondelswart Hottentots, many years ago. This was before the Bondelswart rising in 1922, and the Governor-General made a speech which filled the Hottentots with pride. At the end of the speech the Bondelswart brass band played a tune which all the members knew, and which seemed to them appropriate. It was “Deutschland uber Alles.” And when Weidner heard the details of the speech he wrote a letter applying for naturalisation as a Bondelswart.

Weidner once travelled to Cape Town to ask the Minister of Railways for a line to Goodhouse. He put the case eloquently, and finished by expressing the pious hope that he would see the railway built before he died. “That depends on when you choose to die,” remarked the Minister of Railways. The line has not been built yet, and

that was one of the rare occasions on which Weidner did not have the last word.

Ten years ago I found Weidner still eagerly absorbing the political columns of the newspapers; but he confided to me that he had become “less cantankerous” in politics. This was a notable transformation. I learnt to respect his political forecasts, however, and I know that he has in his possession a letter from a former Prime Minister of the Union sadly admitting the accuracy of one of Weidner’s shrewdest prophecies. When I was last at Goodhouse in 1947, Weidner was still denouncing certain political figures, though less bitterly than he had done in the past.

“It’s hard to find anyone high up with a sense of humour,” he remarked. “If there had been one in Europe, just one, there would have been no war.”

Weidner’s own sense of humour has startled many an impostor. A prospector came to Goodhouse with a marvellous sample of gold

quartz, and expected Weidner to be deeply impressed.

Weidner picked up the heavy nugget and stared at it. “Gold all right,” he said.” In fact, I can still see the King’s face on it.”

Caught off his guard, the prospector grabbed the nugget and gazed anxiously at the specks of gold. Later he became indignant and threatened an action for defamation. Weidner was not alarmed, and he heard no more of it.

Goodhouse is known to the general public, of course, not as an oasis but as the hottest spot in South Africa. For many years Weidner was the official weather recorder there; and he published his views on the climate in a famous pamphlet in which he attacked the Schwarz rain-making scheme. One night, after a magnificent dinner of roast goose, he explained to me why Goodhouse is so hot.

Weidner always has a hearty laugh when the Cape Town newspapers report a heat wave with a maximum temperature of ninety-eight degrees.

He looks at his Stevenson screen and finds a day temperature of 114 degrees (or more), with ninety-eight in the evening.

Goodhouse is only about six hundred feet above sea level. North and south, however, the land rises sharply to three thousand feet; so that the low river forms an air pocket - a hot-air trap - from which there is seldom any release. Cool sea breezes nearly always pass over Goodhouse. Fortunately the super-heated Goodhouse air is intensely dry; otherwise the climate would be intolerable.

The hot Goodhouse air often rises in the later afternoon and battles with cooler down-draughts. A westerly wind springs up as a result, sometimes amounting to a gale. At sundown the wind slackens, and a gentle breeze may reduce the temperature to seventy-four degrees. Goodhouse accepts this mercy gratefully - and sleeps well. Weidner infinitely prefers the dry, hot weather to the moist, cloudy days when the thermometer remains obstinately at ninety-eight.

Although Goodhouse is ninety miles from the sea (in a direct line), the sea exerts its influence even on this distant furnace in the Orange River valley. When fog banks appear on the western horizon, the temperature drops thirty-five degrees within a few hours.

The pay of an official weather observer, I must add, is five shillings a month. Weidner faithfully recorded one of the weirdest climates in the world for this reward. He resents any suggestion that there are hotter places in Africa; he has temperatures at his finger-tips and I would not care to debate the matter with him. Many an opponent has been floored by the fact that the thermometer at Goodhouse, night after night, has registered ninety-five degrees.

Only once has the heat driven Weidner away from Goodhouse. That was in the burning February of 1945, when the mean maximum was 109 degrees and when throughout one ghastly night, the temperature remained at 102 degrees.

Lambs and calves were dying in the heat. Cattle were losing their hooves in the hot sand. Only then did Weidner decide to escape, taking his thermometer with him. He found sanctuary in what he called a "Namaqualand refrigerator" - a four-roomed mat house at the foot of the Kamiesberg within twenty miles of the sea. "This type of construction surpasses anything mechanical air-conditioning could produce - an ideal abode for asthmatics, chest sufferers and people with nervous breakdowns," Weidner wrote to me. "Yet, to be honest, I am beginning to long for a little more sizzling in my old frying-pan."

One of Weidner's greatest friends was Fillis, the circus proprietor. Fillis once offered Weidner a job as a clown; and I believe he thought seriously of taking it. Always a jolly man, with the right build, he would have kept his audience roaring in the big tent.

I was on my way to Goodhouse in 1947 when I asked someone whether he had seen Weidner recently. The man shook his head. "I heard he

was dead - getting on in years, you know, and he must be dead by now."

This disturbed me, though I could hardly believe it. Then I drove down the long, sandy approach to Goodhouse and steered the car cautiously on to the little pont. As the Hottentots hauled the pont across the river I was relieved to see the familiar, portly figure reclining under a reed shelter on the north bank. His wife had died a few years before - a heavy blow - and he had sold the famous Goodhouse farm. But he was still Weidner of Goodhouse to all who knew him, though he was building up a new estate at Haakiesdoorn, exactly opposite his old home.

Seventy-eight, and still full of plans, and the energy to carry them out. He talked to me of the old days in Luderitz, and the irrigation canal that would turn Haakiesdoorn into a paradise. Weidner was constructing a new pont of welded metal, capable of carrying fifteen tons across the river. After that, he wanted to drift down the Orange River in a flat-bottomed boat from

Goodhouse to the sea, taking photographs as he went.

“Alis Valat Prapiis.” That fits him better than his dark suit. He talks of leaving Haakiesdoorn and ending his days on Tristan da Cunha. If he did, it would be a different island; for Weidner leaves the mark of his personality on a place. I cannot think of him living out of sight of his beloved Goodhouse. “The heat suits me,” he remarked before I left. That heat would knock out men half Weidner’s age. But his secret is not to be found in the climate, for Weidner would have mastered the Arctic.

I think that when Weidner first settled at Goodhouse he realised that it is impossible to live in two worlds at once. Goodhouse became his world, and he made it a comfortable and fruitful world. The other world came to his door often enough. He listened to thousands of travellers and remained secure in his own philosophy. I wish there were more Weidners in this world, for he achieved more in his own, hot

little world than the statesmen have done with all their wide horizons.

Not far west of Goodhouse is Vioolsdrift, the last irrigation scheme on the river. Set among the mountains you come upon pockets of rich soil here and there for twenty miles. It was in 1932 that a band of white road-workers, despairing of life on relief schemes at 3s. 6d. a day, decided to build their own water furrow at Vioolsdrift.

Following the earlier example of Cannon Island, they did not approach the government, but simply set to work. First they built hartbees-huisies for their wives and families. Then, having cut up the irrigable land into erven to their own satisfaction, the men returned to road making to raise capital for the enterprise.

It was a brave idea. While the men worked on the official roads, the women and children made a precipitous road of their own to the site where the Vioolsdrift dam was to stand. Whenever

possible the men joined them and blasted the long irrigation furrow out of the rock. All this, mark you, without proper capital or skilled assistance.

Here, as at Cannon Island, government officials were so deeply impressed by the initiative of the settlers that the people of Vioolsdrift were allowed to remain on the land they had seized. Money was voted for a complete scheme - £75,000 which grew to £114,000 before the work was finished.

I should like to provide a happy ending for this story of toil in the wilderness. Unfortunately, as the years passed, it became apparent that Vioolsdrift was a fiasco. Experts visited the place and found too many people on the tiny plots. The settlers, cut off in that distant valley, had no markets and no reasonable transport facilities. The government decided that it would be a waste of public money to go on bolstering up a settlement without prospects.

So the settlers who started work with such high hopes are drifting away from Vioolsdrift. And the muddy, intractable river tears past the abandoned erven on its remorseless journey.

When Mr. A. D. Lewis explored the course of the lower Orange River in 1912 he did not encounter a single white man between Raman's Drift and the sea. He started from Pella intending to ride on horseback. The police advised him to walk, with Hottentots as carriers; they said it would be impossible to ride continuously along the river bank, and they were right.

Lewis travelled on foot during the most severe December heat for half a century. The pace was too fast for the Hottentots; their velskoens wore out, and Lewis had to bribe them with tea and tobacco. Even then he had to engage fresh carriers whenever he came to Hottentot huts. The carriers knew only their own language, and Lewis had to make signs. He had food for a

fortnight, and he was determined to follow the river down to the ocean.

Sometimes he was able to hire a riding ox, but most of the time he plodded along the edge of the water on foot. Often the day's march included climbing; for he came to grey-topped mountains rising sheer from the river for several thousand feet. Granite terraces revealed bands of bright red, yellow, green and black minerals - interesting specimens for a man with a scientific training if only the temperature had not remained steadily above the hundred mark.

Fresh leopard spoor was common enough. At one place some large animal rushed towards Lewis and his party from the river; they could hear tree branches crackling, but they never saw the animal. The carriers dropped their loads and ran up the mountainside. When they returned, they told Lewis a hippo had charged them. Lewis doubted it, though there were still hippos in the river.

At Aussenkehr he found the ruins of an early irrigation scheme with a queer story. Two brothers named Petersen, owners of the Crocodile Hotel in Liverpool in 1887, had sold their business and settled in this incredibly remote spot. One of the Petersens was a consumptive, and his main object was the recovery of his health. Why he should have selected Aussenkehr, an almost unheard-of spot in the no-man's land of the Cape frontier, remains a mystery. The brothers hauled a steam-engine and pumping machinery by ox-wagon from Port Nolloth to Aussenkehr; and for ten years they produced good crops of fruit and vegetables. Then the consumptive died. A mechanic named Nipper, who had been employed by the Petersens, decided to take over the enterprise, but he went bankrupt. Then a retired policeman, Price, went to live at Aussenkehr. Price departed, and from the beginning of this century, I believe, Aussenkehr has seen only occasional visitors - police, prospectors and Hottentots. It is a beautiful stretch of the river, an ideal place for an extreme isolationist.

Only when Lewis approached Sendeling's Drift did he find the Orange River emerging finally from the mountains and entering the coastal plains.

The prospectors know the Orange River canyons better than any other travellers. The late Mr. S. Rabinowitz of Steinkopf, a prospector almost up to the day of his death in 1947, often told me of the journeys he made in the silent world of the lonely river; and of his sufferings when supplies ran short and the heat was a burden.

"King Solomon of the Richtersveld," they called Rabinowitz. He first trekked into that wilderness with pack-donkeys in 1905, meeting only the poverty-stricken Hottentots, the people who live on goats, dassies and wild honey. Over the border the Germans were at war with the Hottentots. At that time Rabinowitz often crossed the river on trading expeditions; and one

day he rode to the nearest German garrison and sold a wagon-load of oats.

As he was returning to the river that night, he and his Hottentot guide entered a deep kloof. "There are men in the kloof," whispered the Hottentot. "The horses know there are men here."

Rabinowitz could see no one in the moonlight. Next day, however, a German patrol was ambushed and wiped out by the Hottentots in that kloof. Long afterwards the Hottentot leader told Rabinowitz that the white blaze on his horse's head saved him in the kloof. They were just going to fire when they recognised him.

That was Rabinowitz's narrowest escape, though he had another when his wagon skidded on the steep track up Hell's Kloof in the Richtersveld. He fell clear, but wagon and donkeys were hurled down the mountainside. The grim scene is still called Rabie's Fall by the Hottentots.

Rabinowitz made many expeditions in search of the legendary "mountain of copper" near the

Orange River. Once during the 1914-1918 War, when copper was £130 a ton, a Bushman offered to lead him to the spot. After days in the mountains they met another Bushman. Next morning the guide informed Rabinowitz that he had changed his mind and decided to keep the secret of the "copper mountain." Rabinowitz argued with the Bushmen, made them tempting offers of tobacco; but he had wasted his time. He always firmly believed the legend. And indeed, there is a huge boulder of pure copper at Kuboos in the Richtersveld, too large to move. This is regarded by prospectors as a signpost to the copper mountain which no one has ever found. Tap the boulder with a hammer, and it rings like a bell.

Moderate wealth came Rabinowitz's way in 1926, as a result of a queer experience that stuck in his mind. Thirteen years previously he was out riding near the Orange River mouth when his horse plunged into quicksands on the south bank. Rabinowitz fell spread-eagled on the sand; but he still had his sjambok and he lashed

the horse until it emerged. He could not mount it, so he grasped the tail and was pulled to safety.

Rabinowitz rode southwards along the coast until he came to the dunes known as Buchuberg. There he rested and hung out his clothes to dry. While lying there he noticed indications of diamondiferous gravel. He did not follow the clue at the time; but in 1926 he went back and prospected the area thoroughly. Before long he found one of the fossilised oyster shells which are typical of the rich Namaqualand deposits. There was something better than a pearl in that oyster - a diamond. Rabinowitz and his partners might have become millionaires if they had worked their claims themselves. Instead, they sold to Dr. Hans Merensky. I believe Rabinowitz's share ran into many thousands of pounds.

He bought three farms in South-West Africa, 65,000 morgen altogether near Karasburg, and stocked them with four thousand karakul sheep. "Black diamonds are better than ordinary diamonds," he declared. He sold the store at Steinkopf, where he had lived for many years

between prospecting trips. And he brought his wife and family to live in Cape Town.

I used to meet Rabinowitz on the seafront at Sea Point occasionally, and he seemed restless. A world tour failed to reconcile him to city life. In 1937 he returned to the Richtersveld. He had a scheelite mine within sight of the river, and he tunnelled into a mountainside to bring out the tungsten ore. Rabinowitz was happy again in the Orange River heat. When he died he was prospecting for diamonds again by special permit near the Namaqualand coast. He was a man who had endured great hardships, but who still preferred life in the open.

Heyes was another prospector who knew the Richtersveld from end to end. He was famous for the journeys he made on foot in that area, covering great distances in a day when there was no other way of reaching water. I remember his seamed, sun-tanned face, and the way his blue

eyes would shine when he spoke of the riches waiting to be uncovered.

Ernest Heyes started his career as a prospector early this century, trekking along the Molopo with “Scotty” Smith. He was at Luderitz in the early days of the diamond discovery. Then he drifted south to the Richtersveld and spent years in the territory to which the old missionary Richter had given his name.

One of the stories Heyes told me emphasised the loneliness of the Richtersveld. Heyes reached the Orange River at a shallow part and saw a man wading towards him from the South-West African side - a young policeman, unkempt and in distress.

The constable told Heyes that he had reached the verge of insanity. His two companions at the outpost had gone off on duty, and he had been entirely alone for two months. He had not seen a white man during that time. His rations were almost exhausted; in fact, he had nothing left but a little mealie meal. As a result of this

experience, he said, he had decided to buy his discharge.

In 1925 Heyes explored the “Wondergat,” the mysterious cavern on a koppie near Annisfontein, three miles south of the Orange River. He took a winch and wire cable to the spot, and was lowered into the darkness.

The cavern, I may say, is avoided by the Hottentots. It would be a danger spot if it was not so remote; for the hole is about twelve feet in diameter, it goes straight down, and the baked earth round the edge crumbles underfoot. The Hottentots call the hole “Heiji Eibib,” and they say it is a tunnel leading to the river, inhabited by white bats and various ferocious monsters. Long ago, according to Hottentot legend, fire and smoke came out of the earth and the cavern was formed by this eruption.

Scientists do not accept this volcanic explanation, for there is no lava anywhere near the entrance. Water action seems improbable, though it may have been the “eye” of a spring in

the far-off days when this desert was a garden. You can hear a rumbling noise near the mouth of the “Wondergat.” Sulphur and mica are found close by.

Heyes went down for about sixty feet and landed on a ledge. The bats that flew in his face were the ordinary brown specimens. There were none of the “stones that sparkle like fire,” which the Hottentots had assured him he would find if he survived the anger of the monsters. He noticed tunnels leading out of the shaft, but he could not reach them with the wire cable restricting his movements. The air smelt sulphurous. Heyes gave the signal, and returned to daylight with only a sample of guano to show for his exertions.

The “Wondergat” was explored again in August, 1947, when the Diamond Detective Department in Namaqualand were following every clue in an effort to round up diamond smugglers. They received information that the source of one rich haul was the “Wondergat.” Sergeants de Kock and Le Roux went to the spot with a coloured constable; and the constable volunteered to

descend with an electric torch and see what he could find. Like Heyes, the constable was unable to reach the bottom. The heat was intense, the bats that Heyes encountered were still there, and there were no diamonds. Take a long wire with you if you go to the “Wondergat”.

I am glad that the name of Cornell is now to be found on the map of the Richtersveld, for this poet and prospector made many valuable geological discoveries in the great bend of the river. Those who followed profited by the written information he left. Cornell’s Berg in the Richtersveld is his memorial.

Oldest of all the Richtersveld prospectors was Mr. William Carstens of Port Nolloth, who is still alive at the age of ninety-one. In another work² I have described how Carstens and his sons discovered the first diamonds in Namaqualand. In 1892 a Hottentot brought a few small

nuggets of gold into Port Nolloth. Soon afterwards a doctor who had been out vaccinating the Hottentots returned with the news that he had seen two fair-sized nuggets in the possession of a chief known as Ou Links. “There must be mountains of gold in the Richtersveld,” said the doctor.

Carstens decided to trace the gold to its source. After a long wagon trek he found Ou Links and gave him a sovereign apiece for the nuggets. Then he asked him to reveal the position of the gold. “If I find enough gold I will build you a proper church,” Mr. Carstens promised.

After much hard travelling, however, it appeared that Ou Links had no intention of giving the secret away. A young Hottentot crept up to Carstens one night and offered to guide him to the right place. The Hottentot displayed a lump of quartz and yellow mica which, he said, had come from the source of the gold.

Carstens was led up a creek about twenty miles from the Orange River. “Within a few minutes,”

² *So Few Are Free* (Timmins, Cape Town).

he told me, "I had picked up a nugget the size of my thumb from the blue shale."

Some weeks later he returned to the spot with the magistrate to verify the discovery, and a "cradle" for washing gold. The magistrate panned eight sacks before he found a "colour"; then two nuggets came to light. Carstens recovered enough gold to make two rings for his wife. The magistrate, however, decided not to proclaim the area as a diggings - he considered it too remote and waterless.

Was this the real source of the Hottentots' nuggets? It is doubtful. Indications of gold have been found in other parts of the Richtersveld since then. Rabinowitz traced a gold reef; and there were rumours at one time that Germans had crossed the river and were taking gold back with them.

The most persistent search for gold in this area was made by Mr. Thomas Billingham, a Yorkshireman. He had been prospecting for seven years when I met him there, and he had just sunk

three shafts to the north of Kuboos, over the mountains.

"Wild country - but a treasure house of wealth", declared Billingham. "I have seen leopard spoors right up to the labourers' huts. The boys will not stay there without guns. Scorpions, too; they are always getting bitten by scorpions. But it is not a bad place. There is a fine large spring of water, and I can grow all sorts of vegetables in my garden."

Billingham and his assistant were two of the three white men in the area at that time, and there was some doubt about the third. It was said that he was a Swede, an old sailor man who had come inland and had made his home in a cave in the face of a cliff near the river. Over seventy, according to the Hottentots, and living on a diet of baboons and insects. A cave man with long hair and a red-grey beard, shunning civilisation.

Wherever you go along the more remote parts of the Orange River you will hear tales of the Great Snake. At first I regarded it as folklore. Now I have gathered so much evidence from reliable people that I believe the Great Snake is something more than legend and imagination.

The Rev. H. C. V. Leibbrandt, first Keeper of the Archives in Cape Town, mentioned a personal experience with the Great Snake. He was brought up on the banks of the river, and natives told him of the snake and its weird powers. Once he was shown a spot where, according to the natives, the snake had been resting among the reeds. "There was a clear impression of a great body, for the reeds had been flattened," recorded Leibbrandt. "However, there were still elephants in those parts, and they may have been responsible."

The powers of the snake, I may add, include a mysterious influence over all who behold it. Those who express disbelief suffer ill-health or death; while those who respect the snake can reckon on good fortune - especially along the

river diamond diggings. The snake can read your thoughts and entice you into the water. It's breath knocks a man down yards away.

So much for the fairy story aspect. Now here is the evidence of Mr. G. A. Kinnear, a general dealer who claimed to have seen the snake in 1899, while on a trading journey in the Upington area. He bartered his goods for sheep, goats and skins; and brought the stock across the river in a flat-bottomed ferry boat.

"The boat had just been fully loaded with goats and was about ten yards from the bank when the head of a monstrous serpent emerged from the stream," declared Mr. Kinnear. "The head, in which were set two large blinking eyes, was from seven to eight inches in width, and the eight to ten feet of body it reared out of the water could only have been about a quarter of its length. Only for an instant did its head appear before it dived again. I waited in suspense for its reappearance as I naturally expected it would make for the boat, but that was the last I saw of it. Hendrik, the boatman, was terror-stricken, and

the other natives holding the goats were screaming in their fear.”

Probably the most authentic account of the Great Snake was given by Fred Cornell. He was camping about twenty miles below the Aughrabies Falls with two companions in 1910, one of them an American named Kammeyer. The Orange River was in flood. One day Kammeyer was bathing in a quiet backwater, where cattle were grazing at the water’s edge.

Suddenly Kammeyer cried out in terror and ran back to Cornell. Kammeyer said that a wave had surged past him, and that the open-jawed head and tremendous body of a huge snake-like monster had emerged to a height of twelve feet. The snake had pounced on one of the calves and disappeared with it. Cornell confirmed the fact that a calf was missing.

Kammeyer stuck to his story. He declared the snake’s body was as thick as a barrel. Hottentots employed by Cornell said they had seen the Great Snake on several occasions, and

had shot at it - but the snake was immune to bullets.

Further down the river the late Father Wolf of Pella Mission told me that years ago the Hottentots kept complaining to him that a huge snake was preying on their stock. Father Wolf was impressed by these reports, and led an expedition into the mountains along the river in search of the monster. He found nothing.

Next the snake appears in the Richtersveld. Heyes, the prospector, assured me that he saw it in 1929 where the Gooiniet River joins the Orange a few miles east of Sendeling’s Drift. “I was three hundred yards away when I saw it, but my Hottentots ran for their lives,” declared Heyes.

Finally a police sergeant on duty near the mouth of the Orange River told me a queer story.

“There is a large snake or something in the river,” said the sergeant. “I have never seen it, but not long ago I caught a coloured shepherd

in a place where he had no right to be. All the country above the high flood level on the north bank of the river is out of bounds - it is a diamond area. The shepherd knew the law well enough, but he told me that he had just seen the Great Snake and dared not go near the river with his flock.”

It is not easy to deceive a hard-bitten sergeant of the South African Police with a fairy story. The sergeant, however, made immediate inquiries among the natives employed by the police to patrol the river and report trespassers. To his astonishment he learnt that his men had not been out on patrol that day. They reported that they had seen the Great Snake among the trees, and pointed out the spot to the sergeant.

“These were trustworthy men,” summed up the sergeant. “They had seen something that very morning. I sat watching the river for a long time, but there was no trace of it.”

It is significant, perhaps, that Sir James Alexander, the explorer who visited the mouth of

the Orange River in 1838, wrote in his book: “Here an immense snake is occasionally seen whose trace on the sand is a foot broad.”

Cornell suggested that the Great Snake might be a new species of giant reptile. I do not think it is necessary to go beyond the known snakes, however, to find a reasonable explanation of the Orange River monster. The average large python is seventeen feet in length, and museum authorities admit that twenty-five foot specimens have been observed. Surely that is a Great Snake, large enough to have been responsible not only for the fairy tales but the true accounts of reliable eye-witnesses.

Obviously there has always been more than one Great Snake in the Orange River. Large pythons do live in the rocky, inaccessible defiles of the unexplored mountains that drop sheer into the river. Pythons are great swimmers - and deadly adversaries when they meet small animals and slow-witted, or unfortunate humans. The pythons of the Orange River created this legend, and they are still keeping it alive.

At many places on the Orange you will also hear the legend of the poisonous lizard that comes out only at night, utters a high-pitched sound, and kills children with its teeth. No such creature exists, of course, for the South African lizards are all non-venomous. But there is a harmless lizard in these regions which may be heard calling at night.

The most fearsome looking lizards of the Orange River mountains are the monitors, or leguaans. These are giants indeed, especially the green water leguaan which sometimes grows to more than six feet in length. Rock leguaans seldom exceed four feet. The Bondelswarts hunt them and use the fat in their medicines.

A cornered leguaan can be a nasty customer, but its strong, sweeping tail is more dangerous than its teeth. The rock leguaan goes to earth during the cold South-West African winter, and remains secure in its burrow unless a ratel finds it.

Yellow tarantulas swarm in the Orange River gorges at certain seasons. Sometimes they drive you from the campfire, and then you are fortunate if you can wade through a side-stream and find an island.

One of the finest sights in the summer is the migration of the Namaqua partridges in search of water. "Kelkewyn!" they call. "Kelkewyn!" The air is filled with brown coveys; there are so many thousands of them that the beating of their tiny wings creates a sound like a high wind in the canyon. Hawks follow the little grouse (they are "partridges" in name only) and take their toll. Often the grouse out fly their pursuers.

Some of the fish in the Orange River might well be mistaken for monsters. The mud barbel, for example, grows to six feet in length and weighs as much as 130 lb. Burchell named it *Silurus Gariepinus*. These sluggish fish are found in slow moving parts of the stream. Dark green above and white below, they have no scales. It is the largest fresh-water fish in South Africa.

When the river dries up, the barbel retreats deep into the moist mud. Special breathing organs attached to the gills enable it to remain alive for months, until the river flows again. You can hook them with worms or meat as bait. The Hottentots spear them in shallow pools at low river. Mud barbel, however, is not much of a dish unless you have been living on tinned food for a long time. The flesh is tough and reddish and rich in oil.

In spite of the intense summer heat in the Orange River canyons, the mud barbel will remain alive for a full day out of water. Return it to the river after hours of exposure to the sun, and it will revive immediately.

The favourite fishing spot on the Orange River last century, and long before that, was at the end of the Aughrabies canyon. There the Hottentots angled with bone hooks and set their karee-wood fish traps. Wikar found a whole tribe living there on a diet of fish, wild berries and wild beans.

Far up in the northern Richtersveld you will see, across the Orange River, the end of a long tributary, the Fish River. Trudge up the dry bed of the Fish for about thirty miles and you come to the weird health resort called Ai-Ais.

Hundreds of farmers and their families trek to Ai-Ais every winter. A tent and wagon town arises in a bowl among the black mountains; and all the people wallow in the hot radioactive mud of the river bed. Miraculous cures are reported from this distant, desert spa. The water bubbles up out of fissures in the black clay at 131 degrees Fahrenheit, and every day from May until August the wagons and cars come down through the mountain passes and stop near the healing waters. In summer Ai-Ais is abandoned, for the heat is unbearable.

These last great loops of the Orange River have drawn many men beyond the limits of civilisation and held them there. Beside the life-

giving waterway the terrifying deserts to the north and south are forgotten.

This indeed is South Africa's "lost world." Otters in the river, baboons in the dark gorges, monkeys swarming among the mimosa trees; and a path along the river bank so narrow that only a pack donkey can follow it. Sometimes there are gaps in the mountain barrier, where old, dry watercourses reach the great river. But most of the way there are only the flanking peaks, and below them the rock terraces baking in the sun and polished by the sands and winds of a thousand years.

The heat comes in powerful waves. Sun helmet and dark glasses cannot shut it out; this temperature would grill a snake in the sand. Only a Hottentot or a Bushman really fits into this landscape - the land of red, hog-backed mountains, weird trees, the sound of the waters and the smell of woodsmoke from the campfire.

No mountaineer ever took greater risks than did the Bushmen when climbing these mountains in

search of honey. Sometimes along the Orange River you will notice a pile of stones at the foot of a precipice. This was not a surveyor's beacon. Look up, and you may still see the great hive which some Bushman marked as his own property.

Bees nest for centuries in these inaccessible cavities. Mountain hives are often extremely rich; the hoard of honey becomes so large that the bees are unable to consume all of it. You need a chopper to break up the outer mass of hard, sugary wax.

The Bushman intent on robbing a hive, and unable to find footholds in the rock, thrust sharp sticks into cracks - just as the modern climber uses steel "pitons" as a last resort. These tough Bushman pegs remain jutting out of many a steep rock face, decaying tributes to the daring of the little men who displayed supreme skill in reaching the hives. Many a Bushman was killed, many were crippled during these desperate climbs. Not only the heights, but the infuriated bees opposed them.

They climbed like baboons, they surmounted the most formidable overhangs with poles and crazy ladders. They got their honey and lowered it in the shells of ostrich eggs. Alpine rape would have helped them as they traversed precariously downwards, but they made the descent with their own sure feet and hands. And that night, you may be sure, they danced beside the Great River.

CHAPTER 11

BUSHMANLAND

FOR HUNDREDS OF MILES the Orange River forms the northern boundary of Bushmanland. I am leaving the river for a time, and I hope you will accompany me into Bushmanland without taking a harsh view of the excursion. There are two ways of looking at the country south of the river.

Often in Bushmanland the traveller must wonder how these vast, aching plains ever support human life. It is a land of whitening bones and ghastly expanses of baked earth littered with small black stones. Once I drove a friend through

the loneliest stretch of it in winter without warning him. He was horrified. I do not think he expected to arrive anywhere that night, and I must admit that I was thankful when I saw the lights of Pofadder in the darkness.

In winter Bushmanland is an agonising territory. The west wind cuts through a leather jacket; men and animals are numbed under the fast-moving clouds. In summer the merciless sun penetrates your helmet and the scorched veld burns your shoes. Dust lingers in your nostrils long after the dust-storm has passed. Hardly anywhere is there comfort. Mud huts, mat houses, pepper trees; their shade is a mockery and there is never a moment's escape from the reality of Bushmanland.

Yet this is the land which Scully the poet once told me he regarded as his spiritual home. He was there in the 'eighties and 'nineties of last century as special magistrate for the Northern Border. There he gathered the material for "Lodges in the Wilderness," the novel that gave him more pleasure than any other story he

wrote. William Charles Scully has been described as “an Irishman with the heart of a Boer.” I think this was true, for he saw not only the face, but the heart of Bushmanland. Scully lived there long enough to watch the miracle of the transformation.

Wait long enough, and one day the lightning and the thunder will redeem their promises and fill the vloers and vleis. You will smell the rain-lashed earth and see a revival that will turn the desert into a green carpet of grass. I believe that I have discovered Bushmanland’s secret. It lives on memories of rain.

Rain wipes out the picture of withered trees and leafless bush. Rain ends the dumb and wretched struggle against long droughts. Rain draws the trekboers together round the vleis; whole families rejoicing because their cattle have been saved. Rain brings the flamingos and wild geese, the smaller birds that nest on islands in the vleis. Rain is the blessing with such power that you can observe the change even in the behaviour of goats and meercats. The sun-

bleached years of suffering are forgotten as Bushmanland lives again.



Trekboer in Bushmanland

You can drive from Cape Town, up through Bushmanland to the lonely bends of the Orange River in one day. I prefer to stop wherever tales are told, in every village, on every farm which will bring me closer to the people of the solitudes.

Now it is the road, the long road between the Paarl vineyards, over the old mountain passes, through the show places of the tourists, past the fashionable holiday farms. Northwards stretches the road, ever northwards to the remote country that is so well described by the Afrikaans word “gramadoelas.”

Ceres is behind me and in this Warm Bokkeveld are the settled and prosperous farms of those who stayed behind when unknown frontiers called the trekkers. Perhaps they chose wisely - those who remained in the thatched houses among the fruit trees. The adventurous spirits went on over the Gydo or beyond Karroopoort. This time I am climbing the Gydo into the Koue Bokkeveld; cold because it is higher than Ceres;

bokkeveld because of the springbok herds that once roamed there.

Great Winterhoek is snow-capped today, and I have no doubt that the Cedarberg peaks will be covered. My car takes the steep gradients of the Gydo in its stride, the pass that last century carried only pack animals and light wagons. And now, between the ranges, the pear trees are etched in purple against white walls. Bushmanland will not be like this.

As I think of the wilderness of Bushmanland the spell of a long drive into distant areas is upon me again. In the city, motoring has no charm for me. Pleasure begins when the tyres are humming on veld tracks. At such times I find myself designing a streamlined motor-caravan, a ship on wheels which will carry me into the far corners while I rest full-length on cushions watching Africa sliding past the windows. I see myself in the air-conditioned cabin cruising steadily across the Sahara, hour after hour, stopping regularly for hot meals and a glass of wine. But I am under no illusions about modern travel. A healthy man

of eighty once said to me: "I thank Heaven that I lived in the time when one rode a horse and travelled by ox-wagon. Those were happy days, better than we have now."

I am ashamed of the closed windows of my car as I hurry on towards Citrusdal; but the snow is on the mountains and I must have comfort. "Hottentot's Kloof" says a sign beside the road. Was it once the lair of a robber band? My old friend who rode on horseback into the north would have heard the story of Hottentot's Kloof at the next outspan. Now it is merely a wayside sign.

No one told me that the pass into Citrusdal is rough and narrow, the sort of place where you might see a leopard on a rock-through the glass window. It is foolish to drive like this, grudging myself the speed that I have under my foot. At Citrusdal I am back on the "Diamond Road" to Namaqualand; and though I shall not follow it far on this run, every mile has its memories.

Just beyond Clanwilliam the road to Bushmanland turns off over Pakhuis Pass, and I leave the valley of oranges. I have a glimpse of Klein Kliphuis farm with its terraced gardens of strawberries and bush tea. Rooibos has a sweet odour, and one night on this pass I smelt it between showers of rain. Such an experience is never forgotten.

I reach a century-old village in the Hantam where, between the wars, I often stayed overnight. Can it be eight years since last I leant against this bar? I know that I have been here before; but now there is the strong impression in my mind that I have never left the place. The kindly hotel proprietor, one of the most conscientious in the country, pours my whisky. I drink reflectively. Why has the clock gone back eight years? That illusion cannot be created merely by old and familiar furniture. I have it. The group at the far end of the bar is the same. One man, not the barman, always stood behind the counter; the privilege of an old customer. He is there tonight. The doctor is in the group. Other

old friends are there, exactly where they stood eight years ago, drinking quietly and discussing the affairs of the district. A decade might have aged them, but this evening they are as I left them.

“This is where I came in,” I say to myself, marvelling at the recollection of something which would have gone beyond recall if I had not returned to the village in the Hantam. Have these philosophers stood like this, at this hour, throughout the eight years? I have seen much since last I enjoyed my whisky in this bar, and I have covered Africa from end to end. Perhaps some of them have been further. If not, they have had great events to discuss in the evenings of the eight years.

One of them has been studying me in the vast mirror which generous whisky distillers in Scotland once sent out to the bars of the world. I can see him identifying me. Now he is so sure that he is addressing the mirror.

“You came down at Brandvlei in an aeroplane in 1929, and I took you to the village and stood you a drink,” remarks the man with a memory. “After one drink you flew off again. Correct?”

It is correct. I remember that drink well, and also my desire to hurry the pilot back to the aircraft with only one drink under his belt. This explanation is accepted, and I am allowed to return the hospitality which I had remembered gratefully for eighteen years.

This is the bar, I recall, where I once started an interminable argument by asking someone to define the frontiers of Bushmanland. Subjects like that are calculated to empty the largest coffee pot, or a vaatjie of witblits. I learnt a great deal about Bushmanland that evening.

In the eighteenth century, I gather, the whole of the Northern Cape was Bushmanland. As the white farmers advanced, the area occupied by the Bushmen contracted; so that logically there should no longer be a Bushmanland. Officially, there is no such place. Yet the name remains

firmly and is applied to wide spaces south of the Orange River, east of Namaqualand, somewhere north of Calvinia and west of Kenhardt.

One man declared that if you drove from Calvinia to Louriesfontein, and then northwards, Bushmanland began beyond the farm Kubiskow. For a century Kubiskow was the last farm in the Cape. There was a house on Kubiskow, at a time when the people using Crown land dwelt in tents. Why Kubiskow? It sounded Russian rather than Afrikaans. Well, that was because many years ago a valuable cow was lost, and everyone thought the Bushmen had stolen it. A commando went out and found the cow, with a newly-born calf, in a kloof above the farm. So they called the koppie Bieskoe. The farmers knew that when small white clouds appeared round the summit of the koppie it would surely rain within a few days. "Kyk na die Bieskoe," they would say when there was any discussion about the weather. The sentence became shortened to "Kebieskoe," and now it is spelt "Kubiskow."

I am on the road again, though it was hard to leave the solid, unchanging group in the bar. But I want to sleep at Louriesfontein again.

Last time I was at Louriesfontein I was greatly troubled because the war had just started. In the "gramadoelas," I thought, there might be peace. They gave me a room opening on to a back stoep; and in the morning I could see a trellised vine through the open door. I began to forget the war, just for a few days. There is an enduring peace in the wastes of Bushmanland.

This journey is colder than my September drive away from the war eight years ago. As I leave Louriesfontein in the morning, Bushmanland welcomes me with a dust storm. First I see it hanging over the mountains, queerly illumined by the sun. Then it sweeps down on the car, rattles against the paintwork and smothers the windscreen. I am forced to stop. It passes, leaving only the heavy odour of dust.

I see the first kokerbooms, trees out of a nightmare. There is a koppie which seems to be

littered with large red flowers, but they are red stones. And it is so cold that I am determined to reach Pofadder before sundown. A night on this veld would be intolerable.

Strange how the dry, searching cold stirs the memory. At home I am never cold. Here I live through cold schooldays and bitter army days, when there was no escape from cheerless experiences. Sometimes I think that is why I am here now - to remind myself of comforts which are too often taken for granted. At the end of this journey my home will seem incredibly luxurious.

Last time I was in Bushmanland there were trekboers moving across the brown face of the country in their wagons. Surely, I say, they must have settled down by now. I am wrong. In spite of all the fences, all the laws that have been passed to hamper the trekboers, in spite of the year 1947, they are still moving. Some of the tented wagons have rubber tyres; but the mysterious gypsy spirit is still alive in the land and the trekboers are still following the old, wriggling tracks.

Farm after farm in Bushmanland has been abandoned. I know this because I am steering by the sun, aiming at Pofadder, but in reality half lost on the plains; and I am knocking at doors to ask which way to turn, and there is no answer.

One farmhouse was open. I walked hopefully to the backdoor, and that was open, too, revealing a room hung with enough biltong to feed a commando for a month. Even there, no one was at home. At last I came to an affable group of men standing outside one of the tiny homesteads that are typical of Bushmanland. They gave me landmarks - salt pans, windmills, dams and wire fences. If I went wrong, they said, it would not matter much as long as I kept the sun on the left. Driving across Bushmanland is like ocean navigation. There is a shortest possible route, but no one ever follows it. You rely on the tracks that wandering wagons have left; you pursue an erratic course; but if you have any sense of direction at all the end of the day finds you nearing your destination.

One farm, the owner told me, was Smous Vlei. Why a farm should be named after an itinerant trader I cannot imagine; but I remembered the name because I wished to discover where I had been. That night at Pofadder I searched my old map of Bushmanland. I found Os Vlei and Lanziek Vlei, Fals Vlei, Sand Vlei, Droogte Gat Vlei, Goobies Vlei, Haas Vlei, Bastiaans Vlei, Kat Vlei; enough vleis, if their stories were known, to fill an encyclopaedia of vleis. But there was no Smous Vlei. I shall never know how I arrived at Pofadder that night, except that I steered by the sun. As I have said before, I was thankful.

Scully, the visionary, had a game reserve of 170,000 morgen proclaimed in Bushmanland as far back as 1893. It must have been one of the first in South Africa, and if it had been respected the modern traveller would not find Bushmanland so lifeless.

But in 'ninety-three it was no use telling the trekboers they could not shoot. A police sergeant rode out from O'okiep at intervals to patrol the reserve; and when he set off the farmers on the borders of Bushmanland would light smoke fires as a warning. The news was passed on faster than the sergeant could ride, and seldom was a hunter caught. So little game was left in 1919 that the reserve was de-proclaimed. Some years later this Crown land was sold.

Until about 1911 most of Bushmanland was Crown land. The survey started in 1908, and was carried out by two remarkable men - J. G. W. Leipoldt (a brother of Dr. C. Louis Leipoldt) and H. J. C. Krapohl. The first year of the survey was a drought year, and the surveyors had to live on bread, tea and thin buck. After the famous rains of 1909, however, Leipoldt once brought down twenty-two wild duck with one cartridge.

No doubt the hunting explained to some extent the fascination which the wastes of Bushmanland held for the trekboers. Apart from biltong, there was a great trade in the feathers of wild

ostriches. They shot for the pot and saved their cattle.

Yet the spirit that moved the trekboers, the restless spirit that still moves them, has never been fully explained. The game has almost vanished. Bushmanland has been fenced, and still I found them on the move in their wagons. "Die wapad is my woning, die reën is my koning," runs an old saying about the trekboers; but even the rain, and the measure of wealth it brings, does not solve the mystery. Many of these people cannot tell you exactly where they were born; they only knew that the wagon stood on a certain stretch of veld on that day. Many of them have a deep-seated preference for wagons, tents or matjieshuisies rather than for brick houses. When they start a farm, the windmill, the stock, every other detail comes before they think of building the house. They say they can hear the cattle at night better through canvas or mat walls.

The truth is that the trekboer is driven by the same indefinable urge that moves the gypsy. Among the nomads of Bushmanland, perhaps,

there is an instinct that comes from the Bible - the only book many of them have studied. Over the horizon there is a Promised Land. Their own veld may be green and thick with flowers; but still the wagon is packed, the family leaves the farmhouse without regrets and the oxen head for the far horizon. Only thus does the trekboer find satisfaction.

Flying over Bushmanland I have observed the tracks of generations of trekboers, meandering over the veld from pan to pan. This is indeed the land of pans, and in a rainy season they are filled like brimming saucers.

It is always possible to forecast rain in Bushmanland by the movements of the insects. Millions of scorpions, beetles, tarantulas and many snakes, too, find snug homes in the cracked pan surfaces. They dare not be caught by the water. Hours before the first drop falls the insect army is on the march across the baked mud, all intent

an reaching high ground. Veld rodents, the plague-carrying gerbilles, accompany them. There are no false alarms in the world where instinct rules.

Many pans in Bushmanland yield valuable deposits of salt. One inexhaustible salt area is known as Great Commissioner's Pan - a stretch of eleven miles with a brilliant crust that looks like snow. A wonderful place in the days of the springbok migrations, when a hunting party would bring down hundreds in a single day and salt the venison for biltong at Great Commissioner's Pan.

It is easy to lose the way on any large pan, for they are the very home of the mirage when the sun is up. A dog grows to the size of an elephant. Motor cars are seen upside down, racing across the sky. The smallest puddle of water is thrown up and magnified into a lake. No wonder Verneuk Pan was given its expressive name. In the burning midsummer of 1902 a mounted policeman took a short cut across Verneuk Pan. His horse bolted and was caught and recognised

by a farmer miles away. A search party went out, but there were no tracks to follow on the hard surface of the pan. Two years later the policeman's skeleton was found. Beside the bones was a pocket knife - and a hollow scratched by the dying man. Little furrows radiated from the hollow. Possibly he had heard thunder; and, too weak from thirst to move, he had prepared the tragic little "dam" to catch the rain that never came.

Scientists are doubtful about the origin of the pans. Livingstone declared they were the remains of ancient lakes. "No satisfactory explanation has yet been given," says Dr. A. W. Rogers in his "Geology of the Cape Colony." He suggests that some, such as Verneuk Pan, were once the beds of rivers. These rivers were choked by sand during successive droughts, and when the floods came at last the sand was spread out uniformly over large areas.

Wind action is given by Dr. A. L. du Toit, another well-known South African geologist, as the cause. The softer layers of the surface have

been cut away by the prevailing westerly winds of Bushmanland, leaving the harder rocks below to form the bottom of a shallow depression. It has also been suggested that the pans were flattened out by glaciers.

I like best the explanation advanced by the old hunters and firmly believed by the farmers and many others to this day. They say the pans were made by animals. Large antelope like the gemsbok, zebra and smaller creatures would come to drink at a spring. Their thirst slaked, they would roll in the mud, hollowing out and enlarging the moist area through the centuries until at last a pan was formed. The animals still visit the pans to lick the salt on the surface or the saline flavour of the white limestone formation at the edges. You will find rocks worn smooth by a million eager tongues. Along the approaches to some pans the tracker will point out the footprints of all the wild beasts, from the unmistakable pugmarks of lion to the huge hoofs of giraffe. At Verneuk Pan I was shown the

imprints of wild ostriches in herds such as one never sees to-day.

In Bushmanland scores of farms are named after the neighbouring pans. The word pan is the most common of all terminations - Angelierspan, Voordeelspan, Graspan. I once drove all night through the pan country. There is a long deviation which is the only way to escape being bogged in rainy weather, and this route led me on to the "Groot Vloer," a chain of pans with a mud farm-house somewhere on the edge of each pan.

I could see no stars owing to the rain, and at night the method of taking compass bearings (still followed by motorists in flat, empty Bushmanland) was impracticable. I spent most of the night finding farm houses and knocking up farmers. I noted the farm names, and in the morning my map showed that I had zig-zagged down that succession of pans calling at almost every remote farm on the way. It was smooth travelling, for the pans are nothing less than

earthen billiard tables. Yet the relief when I struck a rough veld track at last was tremendous.

The pan mirages, which I have mentioned, were responsible for queer errors of surveying in Bushmanland. Early this century, when farms were allotted, the owners had vague ideas of the size of their holdings. Leipoldt and Krapohl, struggling against mirage, were known to err to the extent of two thousand acres on a single farm. (In this dry area a farm of twenty thousand acres is not particularly large.) New surveys have given many a farmer more land than he expected to possess.

Water is a great sight in Bushmanland because it is so rare. In this parched territory men have longed for water more than anything else in the world, and even motorists in recent years have gone through the same nightmares as much older travellers. Boreholes and windmills have greatly

reduced the danger, of course, but there are still lonely tracks with long, waterless stretches.

On the “bult” of Bushmanland in the old days there was no water. No springs, no rivers; only the glaring salt pans. A man riding from place to place had always to face a “thirst” of twelve hours. Journeys had to be planned with precision, and carried out with ruthless disregard for everything save the necessity for reaching the next water-hole in time. Every party of travellers was dominated by the fear that the water-hole that evening might be dry. One man always rode ahead, and came back to the others shouting the news-good or bad.

At a spot called Scuit Klip (Boat Rock) there are two holes in the gneiss on the crest of a ridge. The larger “boat” is twelve feet long, four feet wide and ten feet deep. These reservoirs are filled by thunderstorms and supply travellers and cattle with good water for months. Then comes a day when only a little muddy fluid remains in the sand at the bottom. The traveller must move on, and move fast.

The wells of Bushmanland yield water reluctantly, and it is so bitter that the city-dweller would be sick if he drank it. The people who live there not only drink it, but become so accustomed to the flavour of brine that fresh water strikes their palates as something alien. They must put salt in coffee made from Orange River water before they can enjoy it.

Kenhardt, on the eastern edge of Bushmanland was as tough as its sun-dried appearance in the early days. I was in the bar there one evening when the hotel owner told a story of a Kenhardt hunting party.

“They rode out during the springbok migration and shot a thousand buck,” he said. “That night, in this bar, they emptied a thousand bottles - just to round off the day.”

“A thousand bottles of beer,” I said. “Why, it’s incredible.”

“Beer – who said beer?” inquired the hotel owner peevishly. “No, it was a thousand bottles of brandy they drank.”

I do not believe this fantastic story, but it would have been typical of Kenhardt in its reckless period. “Only those people who found it impossible to make a living in more civilised portions of the Colony came here,” states an old magistrate’s report. “They were without capital or education, and this was one of the most backward districts.”

It seems, however, that they knew how to shoot - and drink.

Kenhardt, who gave his name to the outpost, was an early Bushmanland trader and hunter. No one living remembers the man, though I am sure he was one of those characters who must have been worth meeting after a successful day’s hunting.

The village had its origin in the lawless days of Bushmanland, when the Koranas were raiding and plundering at will and the Cape Parliament decided to appoint a special magistrate to restore

order on the frontier. That was in 1868. Mr. Maximilian James Jackson was the magistrate selected for the task; and a new police force of fifty mounted men was recruited to support him. Thus did Kenhardt become the most remote white settlement in the Cape Colony.

Jackson found a number of starving Bushmen at the place on the Hartebeest River where Kenhardt now stands. They were a remnant of the Bushmen who had flourished in that area. White hunters had shot off the game, and so the Bushmen had been forced to move on. Some had gone to the Kalahari, others had joined the Koranas. The remnant, acting on Jackson's suggestion, were distributed among the Calvinia farmers.

There were four clans of Koranas in the neighbourhood, under the "captains" Piet Rooy, Pofadder, Carel Ruyters and Jan Kivido. Very soon Jackson discovered that his police force was too small to deal with them. Eight months after his arrival Rooy and Kivido intercepted a party of Basters, killed five and stole their cattle.

Inspector Wright, with thirty of the Border Mounted Police and twenty Baster volunteers set out in pursuit of the Koranas. They overtook them at De Tuin mission, a ride of five hours from Kenhardt; but the Koranas were superior in numbers and the police had to retreat as best they could.

Next day Sir Walter Currie and 150 police arrived at Kenhardt, in response to an appeal Jackson had sent to the Cape some time previously. When this news reached the Koranas they fell back on their strongholds on the Orange River islands. These they regarded as impregnable. In three engagements, however, the reinforced Northern Border Police drove the Koranas from the islands and recaptured many wagons and carts and some cattle.

Currie returned to Kaffraria, leaving a mixed force of burghers, Basters and Koranas of the Pofadder clan (who had fallen out with the others) to maintain peace on the frontier. There were still many marauders to be "mopped up," and Jackson was kept busy for some time

afterwards. During these operations Jackson captured the “captains” Rooy and Kivido, and then a large number of followers surrendered. More than a hundred were sent to the Table Bay breakwater prison to serve long sentences. There were Bushmen among these prisoners, and many of them escaped and returned like homing pigeons to Bushmanland. But the Koranas were broken. Jackson ruled the border from Kenhardt with only forty policemen.

Kenhardt had seen occasional trekboers at this period, but it was not until 1870 that Crown land was offered to farmers. According to a traveller who passed through Kenhardt in 1872, the village consisted of three decayed mud houses. One was the magistrate’s home and court-house; another was a store; the third was roofless and uninhabited. The police lived in reed huts. Twenty years later there were still few farmers in the district. Even in 1910 a Kenhardt magistrate reported: “Until recent years this place was regarded as a sort of no man’s land. During the past six or seven years, however, it has made

rapid progress. Farms sold for sixpence a morgen are now worth two shillings a morgen.” .

Nevertheless, there were still thousands of square miles of unsurveyed ground in the Kenhardt district, You could still ride for a hundred miles in many directions without seeing a house or a white person. In the early years of the century, horses, cattle and sheep fetched high prices and the farmers loaded their saddle-bags with golden sovereigns. The Germans, at war with the Hottentots in South-West Africa, were insatiable in their demands for transport animals. Donkeys sometimes fetched £10 apiece. Those were golden years indeed, and Bushmanland has never known better times.

CHAPTER 12

PEACE BENEATH THE PALMS

FOR YEARS there was an oasis in Bushmanland where I was always sure of a welcome - a group of white buildings and date palms where a deep peace rested like a benediction. I have no doubt

Pella is unchanged, but I have not called there since Father Wolf died.

Cammas Fonteyn is the oldest name, a spring welling out of a parched, sandy, river bed in a ghastly desert. The mountain close by was an old Bushman stronghold. From there the Bushmen would set out on raiding expeditions to the farms of the Hantam; crossing 150 miles of waterless country; hiding ostrich eggs filled with water every twenty miles; returning with stolen cattle. If the farmers did not overtake them during the first fifteen miles of pursuit, then the Bushmen were safe. In a dry season only a Bushman, with secret reserves of water, could survive the journey to Cammas Fonteyn. Thousands of sheep, hundreds of cattle, were driven north by the Bushmen during those raids. The bones of animals slaughtered for gargantuan feasts littered the sands round Cammas Fonteyn for a century.

As far back as 1776, however, a white man, Coenraad Feijt, gained the confidence of the Bushmen and settled at Cammas Fonteyn. He,

and Jacobus Bierman who followed him, must have been pioneers of “infinite fortitude.” A hundred years later Cammas Fonteyn was still far from law and order.

Christian Albrecht of the London Missionary Society named the place Pella in 1812. He had been driven south of the Orange River with his converts by the Hottentot chief Jager Afrikaner; and at Cammas Fonteyn he thought he had found a sanctuary like that in Macedonia where the Christians of Jerusalem sought refuge from Roman persecution. Pella it remained, but Albrecht died soon afterwards.

John Campbell, Robert Moffat, Heinrich Schmelen and other famous missionaries all toiled at Pella at various times. It was only after one of the priests had been murdered by Bushmen that the London Missionary Society abandoned the sun-baked outpost. Thompson, the traveller from Cape Town, touched at Pella in 1824 on his way to Aughrabies and found the mission deserted. It was a bad season that year, and Thompson and his men were almost starving

when they reached the springs. They ate zebra hide, bruised between two stones, at Pella - about as palatable a meal as a boot.

So for more than sixty years Pella remained without a mission. Moffat the surveyor found Francois Gabriel, a Frenchman, living there in 1855, married to a Baster girl. He had been a lieutenant in Napoleon's army; and from the ruins of the mission he had built a house and made a garden. Gabriel moved away to Namaqualand, and for years only the Basters and Bushmen used the lonely Pella springs.

Pella is only a few miles from the Orange River, near a bend which the Hottentots call "the Curve that Shines." It is half-way between Springbok and Kakamas on a fast track for motor cars; but before the days of motoring a terrifying "thirst" stretched east and west of Pella, and there were some who did not survive the trek. Even in recent years, in times of drought, I have travelled that road seeing only the empty veld without a human being.

I once read the diary of an official who touched at Pella in 1873. "The missionary's house and store have been burnt," he wrote. "The garden fences are broken, the water furrows choked and the trees dead. I found relics of the missionary's furniture on the mountainside - including a candlestick. Even now there is a Bushman on top of the mountain acting as sentry, and lucky for you if you are not compelled to pass this way alone."

To this desolate scene in 1878 "came another missionary - a Roman Catholic in an ox-wagon, Father Godelle of the Society of the Holy Ghost. He struggled at Pella for several years, but the intense heat was too much for him. Broken-hearted, he returned to France.

Another young French priest heard of the failure of the mission and volunteered to make a fresh start at Pella. Father Simon was his name, he was twenty-three, and he belonged to the Order of St. Francis De Sales. The motto adopted by Father Simon was: "*Tenui et non dimittam.*" For more

than half a century he lived up to that principle. "I have grasped and I will not let go."

It took Father Simon six weeks in an ox-wagon to reach Pella from Cape Town in 1882. Some months after his arrival the young priest was trekking through the sand dunes to Springbok to fetch supplies for the mission. His oxen died, and he set out on foot for the nearest farm. There were no waterholes on the way, and at last he fell exhausted. Then he knelt and prayed. A native found him later, unconscious but still alive. There was a water-hole a hundred yards away.

For two years Father Simon carried on the work alone. Then other priests from France joined him. The heat, the loneliness, the hardship appalled them. One of them broke down mentally. All of them departed.

I think Brother Wolf must have been specially selected for the task, for I have never met a stronger character. Born in Alsace, his earliest memory (he once told me) was the sound of the cannon roaring close to his home all night as the

French retreated before the invading Germans in the war of 1870. He was twenty-one when he agreed to spend his life in a new world, entirely different from the fields of Alsace.

That was in 1885, and I heard the story of the early years at Pella in 1935. Bishop Simon was dead, the lay brother had become Father Wolf, and it was his golden jubilee year. Pella Mission lay under the strong winter sun; but the veld and even the mountains were green after the best rains for many seasons. The wheat had been sown, the mission was flourishing.

Father Wolf, when I knew him, was a stocky man with a wide-brimmed hat, the grey clothes of a priest, beard and moustache and a benevolent face. I remembered his golden jubilee, and asked him whether there would be celebrations.

"Celebrations?" Father Wolf shook his head. "Too much noise. That is bad for an old man. We will celebrate by taking a glass of wine and talking about the old days."

It was the wine of the mission, a self-reliant place, far from the outside world. Many travellers have enjoyed that hospitality in the wilderness.

“Bushmen were still living in the mountains when I arrived, but they became our friends”, began Father Wolf. “They hid from other white people, but they brought us some of the game they killed. Now in all Bushmanland it would be hard to find one pure Bushman. Here there is not even a rock painting to mark their passing. In those days we rode on horseback with the veld flowers touching our shoes. The seasons were better, and soon our gardens were planted and we were able to start work on the cathedral. I had never had a hammer in my hands before.”

Father Wolf looked up at the cathedral, and I could imagine those two determined Roman Catholics toiling in the sun. They knew so little of the craft of building, it seems, that when a plumb line was sent to them from France they could not identify it. Bricks had to be baked on the river bank six miles away, where there was

suitable ground. They had many thousands of bricks ready to be carted by wagon to Pella; but then the river came down in flood and carried their work away. They started again, strong in their faith; they made hundreds of journeys with the loaded wagons to the building site.

Limestone had to be found, and the nearest deposit was a hundred miles away. Unaided, they learned to slake it. Then there was timber, and Brother Wolf swam to the islands in the river with an axe on his back and cut the willow trees. They were like desert Robinson Crusoes. Over dung fires they hammered and twisted the metal for a spiral staircase. Father Simon carved a crucifix and a beautiful pulpit. They made the ceiling from the boxes in which their stores arrived. Only the altars came from France.

For seven years they laboured. Once Father Simon slipped from the scaffolding and broke his collar-bone. During all this time one small house had to serve as church, school and dwelling. Often they were hungry. Drought killed their stock, and they were forced to fall

back on a Hottentot diet. They ate dassies, finding them tough and unpalatable until they learnt to soak them in vinegar, like venison. But the work went on triumphantly. They built the massive pillars that flank the aisles; the architraves, the long gallery; they set the cross on the pinnacle of the spire in an ecstasy of fervour.

“As we built, the human population of the mission grew,” went on Father Wolf. “At first most of the people were Hottentots who had lived wretchedly in mat huts. Then more Hottentots and Hereros joined us, refugees driven over the frontier by the Germans. Thirty years since the Hereros came, and their descendants are still the same proud people, a race apart. Only once has a Herero at the mission married a person of another race. They worked in the copper mines of Namaqualand, returned to us with cattle and made money.

“The languages were a difficulty. I learnt English easily, and much English was spoken in the early days, as the Cornish miners had been in the

country for a long time. But there was also the Nama language of the Hottentots, the Herero language and Afrikaans. All those I learnt, but the chatter of the Bushmen was too much for me.”

The church was finished, and on August 15th, 1895, Bishop Rooney of Cape Town arrived by Cape cart and blessed and dedicated the Church of the Immaculate Conception - Mother Church of all the Roman Catholic missions in the area. Before the end of the century Father Simon went to France to be consecrated as Bishop of Thaumacos, and he returned to Pella as Vicar Apostolic of the Orange River. That was Bishop Simon's only visit to France. All the rest of his life he spent in Bushmanland.

Nuns of the Order of St. Francis de Sales have worked at Pella since the beginning of the century. They, too, remain at the mission for life - unless one is called to France for the election of a new Mother Superior of the Order.

“Africa is changing,” remarked Father Wolf. “We had a hard life. We saw the springbok trekking past Pella in their millions for the last time in 1906 - a sight to remember. Where there was one farmer, now there are ten or fifteen. There were no doctors. I have pulled out many teeth, but now I am old and I find it too nerve-racking. Yet after fifty years it is good to see that all is well at Pella. It has been worth holding. More than four hundred people are living here happily on our mission and we are educating a hundred children. At Pella we have a laundry, a bakery, our sheep, goats, wheat and gardens. This year the wells are giving water everywhere. How the Mission has spread since I first came to Pella! There are now twenty missions and outstations north and south of the Orange River - nine thousand Catholics in the vicariate.”

I walked through the gardens with Father Wolf, and he told me of the days when leopards and jackals preyed on the stock. Often he found baboons leaping over the wall with melons under their arms. There were severe droughts, too -

especially the great drought in the early ‘nineties of last century.

“Nearly every year men died of thirst in the desert round Pella,” said Father Wolf sorrowfully. “Once I saw a German trader who had crossed the river at Raman’s Drift on the way to O’okiep. He had scooped out a hole in the dry ground with his hands, searching for water, and the poor man lay dead beside the hole he had made.”

Once only did Father Wolf return to Europe on leave. It was in 1910, and the transformation of the cities he had known a quarter of a century before alarmed him. He found himself dodging motor cars. “I was used to a dry country, a peaceful country,” he declared. “I hurried back to Bushmanland. Pella is tranquil.”

I knew it, but I could also sense the great tranquillity in the heart of Father Wolf. He was offered leave again in 1935, but he refused.

One result of that disturbing visit to Alsace was the vineyard at Pella. At the suggestion of

Bishop Simon, Father Wolf brought back some vines. Two years later they had their own wine, and later they made brandy.

Pella has a mild winter. The sweet potatoes grown at the mission are famous, peach trees blossom in July. But in summer the shade temperature at the low-lying mission runs up to 120 degrees.

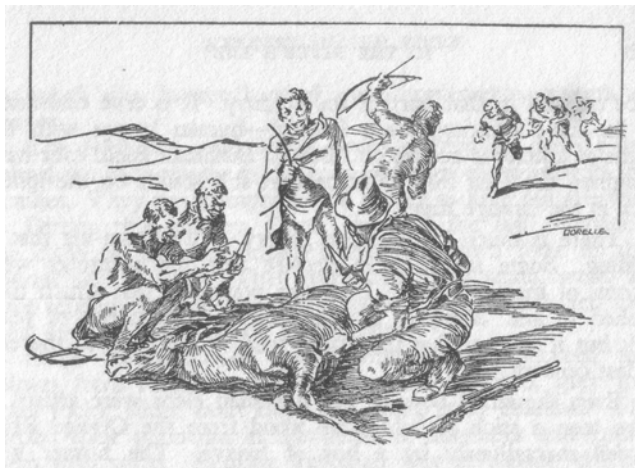
Priests and nuns travelled for hundreds of miles to Pella in June, 1932, when Bishop Simon celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his arrival. The excitement was too much for the old man with the flowing white beard. He fell ill, renewed his priestly vows and died. Again there was a great pilgrimage to Pella, but a sorrowful one. Twelve hundred people sang the "Te Deum" as the Bishop was buried before the altar in Our Lady's chapel. Many who knew him still pray at the tomb of Bishop Simon.

The next event that Pella remembers was the golden jubilee of the dedication of the

Cathedral. It was in 1945, and Father Wolf, the pioneer priest, was there at High Mass as the sun came through the stained glass windows and shone on the white-clad first communicants, on the white habits of the Sisters, on the figures of Christ and His Angels looking down from pedestals and niches. There was the bowed figure of Father Wolf saying his rosary in the sanctuary.

Father Wolf lived on at Pella until February, 1947. "Simple as a peasant he remained," said one who knew him during his last years. "Men die as they live, and so did Father Wolf. As a lamp slowly goes out and leaves one in the dark, so passed Father Wolf, slowly, peacefully, without illness." He was eighty-one.

I have no doubt that Pella is the same tranquil white oasis that Bishop Simon and Father Wolf made it, and that the doves still find shelter in the date palms from the raking sun.



CHAPTER 13

MYSTERY IN THE RIVER

ON A ROCK in the Orange River you will find the strangest Bushman engraving in all Africa. The place is so lonely that I doubt whether any scientist has examined the engraving. It depicts the Last Supper.

The Rev. Heinrich Kling, one of the Rhenish missionaries at Steinkopf in Namaqualand for

many years, vouched for the existence of this mysterious engraving. He gave the position as opposite the point where the Great Fish River enters the Orange - a locality far from the well-known tracks, and roughly ninety miles from the river mouth. One of Kling's coloured assistants had reported the engraving, and Kling puzzled over the origin of it for years. The scene pecked out on the water-worn rock with stone tools showed twelve men sitting at a long table, and one standing.

Kling finally formed the theory that the engraving might be traced back to the murder of William Threlfall, the English missionary in 1823. Threlfall and his assistant were stoned to death by Bushmen while they slept. Then the wagons were looted, and Kling thought that an illustrated Bible fell into their hands, and that a Bushman artist might have copied the picture.

It was an ingenious explanation of the mystery, but it is not entirely satisfactory. Bushman artists were not in the habit of copying anything. They worked from life, so that if you see an elephant

or a rhino on a rock you may be sure those animals once roamed in that part of the country. It is true that some of the cave paintings were fanciful - human beings with the heads of antelopes and so on. But no Bushman could ever have imagined the Last Supper scene that still stands on the lonely rock in the Orange River.

There is much in the huge gallery of Bushman art that is baffling. Some investigators declare that the paintings were a form of magic, and the Bushmen portrayed that which they wished to kill. Many of the paintings are thousands of years old; but it is clear that the artists were at work up to the end of last century.

Even the small boys of the Bushman clans were artists. I have seen a stick of wild olive wood from the Orange River carved marvellously by a boy of twelve. The farmer who watched the work said that the boy used a pocket-knife, ground to a fine point. The boy decorated the stick with puff-adders, ostriches, men with guns, a prickly pear plant, a guinea fowl, springbok, a

horse, and most surprising of all, two deer with antlers.

Antlers appear in a few cave paintings, and the “takhoring” tradition still lingers among some of the Bushmen clans. There are, of course, no deer with antlers in South Africa apart from those which have been imported by zoos in recent years. Thus the “takhoring” legend is regarded by some students of Bushman art as proof that these people once lived in Europe and hunted deer with antlers. A fossilised antler was found near Port Elizabeth, however, in June, 1947, the first ever excavated in the sub-continent. Bushmen must have long memories.

Modern artists marvel at the freshness of the paint in the caves, and the skill of the Bushmen whose work remains vivid after thousands of years. The man who discovered the Bushman technique was a geologist named E. J. Dunn, who spent four months in Bushmanland in 1872 with an armed escort of Northern Border Police.

Dunn had worked previously in Australia, so that he was able to compare the Bushman way of life with that of the aborigines. He found the Bushman shelters more primitive than those of the Australian blacks - just a circle of melkbos, a lair in the grass near a large rock, a mere wind-break giving shade but seldom a roof. On the floor he noticed loose skins (but never karosses), empty ostrich egg-shells, the paunch of a springbok used as a water container, dishes of ox-horn, tortoise carapaces, whisks of hyaena hair, bone spoons from springbok ribs, leather bags of stone implements, quivers and arrows.

The Bushmen, said Dunn, were content to drive a wild animal out of a cranny in the rock and then move in with their families. They never improved on a cave to keep out the wind.

During this journey, Dunn observed the last remnant of the clans of Cape Bushmen living their own lives in their natural surroundings. They were still using stone, wood and bone implements and their own pottery, and he collected more than seven hundred stone implements.

Dunn recorded that the Bushman artists secured their colours from red haematite, yellow oxide of iron, grey from shaly rocks, white from clays and black from charcoal. They carried their pigments in the horns of antelopes and applied them with sticks. Painting was their way of passing the time when they were prevented from hunting. The only mystery that has not been solved is the substance which gave the paintings their weather-resisting properties. Dunn suggests that it may have been latex and resins from plants.

There can be few white people still living who watched the Bushmen doing their paintings, for the artists were dying out in the middle of last century. It is clear from old descriptions, however, that the Bushman painter started with a perfectly clear mental image and jotted down a number of isolated dots. Only when he was satisfied with his dots did he run a free, bold line from one to another: As he did so the animal or human form would take shape. His accuracy of touch was such that once a line had been drawn, it remained.

At first the Bushmen confined themselves to animals, and the rock engravings represent the dawn of art among them. They had been engraving and painting for centuries, apparently, before they attempted human figures. Critics have said that some of the animals look stiff and unnatural; but the fact is that the Bushman artist had an eye like a slow-motion cine-camera; he saw the legs of a running antelope, for example, in a complicated and unusual position, and he painted exactly what he saw.

These little cave men seldom depicted still life. They preferred action. Their hunters were always tense and ready with their bows and arrows. Depth and perspective never bothered them at all; but they achieved a stark and faithful realism. They had symbols for rain and lightning. Some of the finest examples reveal a strong sense of humour - a young baboon pulling the tail of an older one; or a Bushman disguised as an ostrich arousing the suspicions of his victim. No race on earth ever observed the habits of animals more closely than the Bushman. A

baboon scratching for water, a buck in its death agony, a charging rhino ... these were typical subjects which inspired the Bushman artist.

Trees and plants are missing in the cave paintings. Probably the Bushmen were unable to find the colour green and so avoided subjects demanding that pigment. One solitary painting of an aloe is known, and that is coloured red.

I have one of the rarest forms of Bushman art in my possession - a carving from a Kalahari cave. Seldom do you hear of the Bushmen as sculptors; but this brown stone baboon head reveals clever workmanship.

A native found the baboon head carved on the rock wall of the cave and hammered it off, fortunately without damage. The marks of cleavage are distinct. He took it to a storekeeper, who gave this enigma in stone to me. It is an old man baboon to the life, with wrinkled forehead, deep-set eyes, hare-lip and pouched mouth; small enough to hold in the hand. A sculptor assured

me that no modern tools had been used on my baboon head.

I know of only one other example of Bushman sculpture. That is a head in the McGregor Museum in Kimberley, carved from Karoo dolomite and found eight feet below the surface of a Kimberley suburb. I wish that I could find the desert cave where my baboon head was carved; for the storekeeper thought there were others on the wall from which mine came. But he had lost touch with the native who found it - and the desert is wide.

Possibly as a result of superstition, the Bushmen seldom depicted snakes in their rock engravings. Mr. James Drury of the South African Museum discovered two snakes on a rock during a Kalahari journey in 1921, and these are the only snake engravings known in that territory. In other regions Bushmen eat snakes; but Drury found that the Bushmen in the locality of the engravings dreaded snakes. It must have been an ancient "taboo," for the engravings were very old and the Bushman clans living there could tell

Drury nothing about them. Other animals carved on rocks included eland, gemsbok, wildebeest and zebra; the spoor of various antelopes; and in several places the Bushmen had carved human footprints. These rock engravings are believed to be signs used by the Bushmen to indicate water and game.

One of Drury's tasks was to learn the method by which the Bushmen made beads of ostrich egg-shell. Various descriptions are given in scientific works, but these were based largely on conjecture. Drury found that the beads were made by the women. An ostrich egg was broken into large pieces, and then smaller fragments were bitten off. Holes were drilled with an iron-pointed stick held between the palms. Stones were used as hammer and anvil to trim the beads into disc shapes. All the beads were reduced to uniform size by threading them on a strong piece of gut, so that the whole became a solid and rigid mass like a stick. Then the beads were ground smooth with a rough stone. A woman told Drury that she had taken just over "three moons" to

make a string of beads nearly twelve feet in length. She parted with the whole string for two handfuls of tobacco.

You hear the last, faint echoes of Stone Age music among the Bushmen. Some of their instruments have vanished - like the primitive, four-stringed harp which appears in a cave painting. But the melancholy notes of the "gora" may still be heard in the desert - the one-stringed Bushman violin found only in South Africa. It was invented by the Bushmen and elaborated by the Hottentots; just a bow strung with gut, but with an ostrich quill attached to one end of the gut. The player vibrates the gut by sucking and blowing into the quill. In the distance the "gora" sounds like a faint bugle.

The "gora," of course, originated in the ordinary bow used for shooting. Ancient hunters discovered they could produce chords of music by twanging their bow-strings. Later they amplified these sounds, as in the "gora." An interesting variation noted by Dunn, the geologist, in Namaqualand nearly eighty years ago was a

tortoise violin - the shell of a tortoise on a ten-inch stick, strung with sinew and played with a grass stem.

Although the Bushmen had other musical instruments it never occurred to these Stone Age people that orchestras could be formed. The women made ankle-rattles from springbok ears with fragments of ostrich shell inside - the so-called "Bushman bells." They do not seem to have had drums of their own, but they copied the Hottentot "rommelpot" and called it a "tam-tam." Their songs are without words, and are yodelled.

The antelope horns used by the Bushmen when hunting can hardly be classed as musical instruments, for they were used as decoys. They gave out a bleating note, like the cry of a young buck; and even leopards were sometimes deceived by this cunning device.

It must have taken the Bushmen centuries of patient research to produce their deadly arrow poisons. The age-long process of trial and error

gave them knowledge which modern scientists do not yet possess.

These little people, surrounded by enemies, were probably stimulated in their efforts by the grim fact that their bows and arrows did not give them sufficient protection. Seeking greater power, they searched the plant world with which they were so familiar. But plant juices alone, did not yield satisfactory results. The great skill of the Bushmen lay in the complex and deadly mixtures which they finally prepared.

Thus when the juice of the common poison bush (*acocanthera venenata*) was found to be only mildly poisonous the Bushmen blended it with one of the euphorbias. The final compound was an instant killer. The early Bushmen knew that milk of euphorbia would make small pools of water slightly toxic; then they added snake venom and secured a powerful poison. Some of their most dangerous poisons would not stick to the arrows, and it must have taken the Bushmen a long time to discover the right fixatives.

In the Kalahari the Bushmen have a lion poison which they call "N'kwa," and which is still a mystery to analysts. "N'gwa" is a caterpillar. There are no poisonous caterpillars. Another desert poison about which little is known is the bulb used for tipping arrows before hunting buck. This poison kills the antelope fairly quickly, but does not spoil the meat.

Even less is known about the Bushman's antidotes. A creeper called "Eokam" is used, and it certainly causes vomiting; but that does not explain its influence over poison in the bloodstream. Policemen who patrol Bushman country know only one way of saving life when one of their number (or a horse) is struck by an arrow. They seize a Bushman, jab the poisoned arrow into his arm, and demand the antidote. Rough justice, but it has proved effective on desperate occasions.

Dunn was escorted through Bushmanland by Mr. Maximilian Jackson the Kenhardt magistrate, a sergeant, and fourteen troopers of the Northern Border Police. Even in 1872 it was not

considered safe for him to cross the country alone. The country was suffering from a severe drought, and Dunn declared afterwards that they were fortunate in completing the long trek without loss of life. At many places they found evidence or heard stories of Bushman poison. One victim was a little Bushman girl who had been approached by members of another clan and told to give up the goats she was minding. She refused, and was killed by a poisoned arrow.

Dunn declared that the Bushmen had no regard for human life, and were so ruthless and dangerous that the police had orders to arrest any wild Bushmen they encountered. If they could not make arrests, then they were instructed to shoot.

Whole families of white trekkers had been poisoned by spiteful Bushmen who considered they had a grievance. Dunn's party came to many water-holes which had been poisoned with plants, and this added greatly to their difficulties. The Bushmen themselves, Dunn added, must often have suffered tortures from thirst in the dry

years. Even a Bushman could not survive two days in Bushmanland without water.

On a spoor, Dunn found, the Bushmen were superior to the Australian aborigines. Their vision was so keen that they could tell whether a man on the skyline was a trekboer or a native. When out hunting they wore gemsbok or ox-hide sandals to protect their feet from hot sand or thorns. These sandals also formed their "iron ration." If they were far from home and had killed nothing they put their sandals in the ashes, pounded the leather and boiled it into a soup.

Bushman hunters limited the places where the buck could drink by blocking up some of the water-holes. Then they built screens close to the remaining sources of water and lay in wait for hours with their bows and arrows.

They also loved horseflesh. Bushmen working for farmers would select an old horse, kill and eat it, and then stuff it with grass. So cunning was their taxidermy that if the farmer did not

examine the horse closely he would think it had died naturally.

The Bushmen welcomed locust invasions. When the locusts settled at night the Bushmen fired the grass, gathered the scorched locusts, picked off legs and wings, and ground up the bodies. They grew plump on this diet.

In lean times the women collected kambro plants, fleshy roots like large, flat turnips. The kambro is full of sap, a good substitute for water. Another Bushman food was the garp. There are bitter and sweet varieties of this cactus-like plant, and the sweet tastes like liquorice. But the Bushmen were improvident. They gorged after a kill, and never thought of storing any form of food.

It took nearly a hundred years to compile the first and only dictionary of the Bushman dialects. The task, completed early in 1947, makes an unusual story. In the 'fifties of last century the

Cape Government engaged a philologist, Dr. W. Bleek, to study native languages. Dr. Bleek found a number of Bushmen in prison in Cape Town; and from the moment he heard their primitive, clicking speech he concentrated on it and made the first scientific study of the language.

Very soon Dr. Bleek realised that Bushman was entirely different from the other two great native language groups of South Africa, Bantu and Hottentot. He had nothing to work on, so he started his dictionary by giving the Bushmen picture books intended for children and translated the pictures of everyday objects into Bushman words. He was assisted by a relative, Dr. Lucy Lloyd; and together they filled a long row of school exercise books with the sayings of the Cape Bushmen. Their studies were confined to that one tribe.

Dr. Bleek died in 1875, leaving a daughter Dorothea aged three. The little girl, brought up by Dr. Lloyd, continued her father's work; and after the death of Miss Lloyd in 1914, Miss

Bleek became the world's leading authority on the Bushman language.

I talked to Miss Bleek in the same Cape Town suburban garden where her father had talked to the Bushman prisoners long ago. It was easy to imagine them crouching on the grass, smoking Dr. Bleek's tobacco, and chattering away in their incredibly difficult clicks and gutturals. New symbols had to be devised to reproduce the sounds uttered by these little people of the Stone Age. That was one of the reasons why the task went on for nearly a century.

Miss Bleek was not content to limit the study to the Cape Bushmen. I have already mentioned her Kalahari journey in company with "Scotty" Smith. Later she went further afield, to the Masarwa Bushmen in Bechuanaland, the Naron in South-West Africa, to Southern Rhodesia and Angola, and to the Hadzapi hunting people of Tanganyika. Once she spent four months alone, living in an abandoned police station on the edge of the Kalahari, gaining the confidence of the

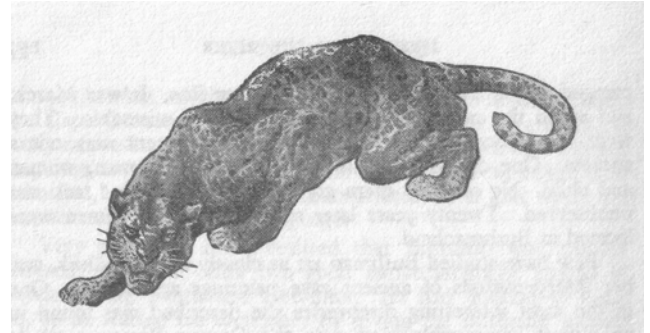
Bushmen through knowledge of their language. She never carried a weapon in her life.

Miss Bleek told me of the party of Bushmen who were taken to Cape Town in 1884 after they had been at war with the Hottentots in the Kenhardt district. The government arranged for them to travel by sea from Port Nolloth - a strange and frightening experience for the Bushmen - and on arrival they camped out at Salt River near the railway line. It was March, and when the rain came the Bushmen were miserable. They were apprenticed to farmers; but the experiment was not a success. One day the Bushmen vanished, every man, woman and child. No one saw them go, and their northward trek was unobserved. Twenty years later some of these Bushmen were located in Bushmanland.

Few have studied Bushman art as closely as Miss Bleek, and her interpretations of ancient cave paintings are famous. One of the most interesting discoveries she described was found in an almost inaccessible glen near the Orange River - a whole Boer commando of

forty riders, including one man with a gun. These men were voortrekkers, of course, and the painting is one of the very few in which a Bushman artist depicted white people. I asked Miss Bleek whether she could explain the controversial “Lady of Brandberg” painting in South-West Africa, said to represent a white woman of Grecian type, and estimated to be thousands of years old. Miss Bleek replied that some interpretations were too imaginative. She thought the painting might represent a Bushman woman with face smeared with pink clay. Alternatively, the picture might have been painted after the first missionary women had settled in South-West Africa.

Miss Bleek’s summing up of the Bushman lingers in my mind. “He is all his life a child,” she said, “averse to work, fond of play, of painting, singing, dressing up and acting - above all fond of hearing and telling stories.”



CHAPTER 14

INFINITE FORTITUDE

MANY WHITE MEN have lived close to nature in the solitudes to the north and south of the Orange River. Voortrekkers, soldiers, explorers, farmers, trekboers, police on camels, outlaws on horseback, missionaries, men of infinite fortitude - some found what they sought and the happiest were those who did not seek wealth.

Yet I know one fugitive who lived the most primitive life of all, penniless and hungry as any Hottentot; and he became the richest man in South-West Africa. I do not think it would have

turned out like that in any other country. Ernst Luchtenstein is his name, and he gave me a new impression of the wilderness that stretches down to the river. Only a strong character could have survived the life of extreme isolation that Luchtenstein chose. For eighteen months he lived in hiding among the Karas mountains and made the veld support him.

His father was a German transport rider, carrying supplies to the army in the field during the war against the Hottentots. Ernst arrived in Luderitz in 1906 with his mother, two brothers and a sister; he was eleven years old when they left the seaport to join the head of the family at Keetmanshoop.

They travelled with a convoy of seven ox-wagons, loaded with army stores and their own little possessions. Between Aus and Kankeip, military outposts on the 200 mile track to Keetmanshoop, the convoy was intercepted by Cornelius, leader of the Bethanie Hottentots.

Ernst's mother, new to that wild country and desperate in the desire to save her children, ran forward and knelt before Cornelius.

"Kneel before God, but not before any man," said Cornelius in perfect German.

Cornelius looted the stores, but left the Luchtenstein wagon untouched. (The same chivalrous treatment of women and children, you see, which Von Schauroth had described to me in his castle.) Next morning a small German patrol was sighted, however, and Ernst saw the Hottentots shooting down the soldiers. That was the first of many adventures in the territory.

After a few weeks at school in Keetmanshoop, young Ernst went to work as his father's touleier (leader of the team of oxen), and later as a wagon-driver. He fell out with his father and found a home with a farmer named Mackay. It was a queer household, for Mackay had married a Hottentot and there was a large half-caste family. Ernst grew up with them, learnt tracking and all the lore of the veld; he spoke Hottentot

fluently and could understand the Bushmen. The farm was called “Paradise,” about 18 miles to the north of Keetmanshoop and close to the present Berseba native reserve.

The war with the Hottentots dragged on. One night a band of Hottentots raided “Paradise” farm, awoke Mackay and demanded rifles. Mackay was a bold man with one eye and the appearance of a pirate. “If you want my rifle, you’ll have to take it,” challenged Mackay.

The Hottentots contented themselves with killing one of Mackay’s cows and roasting it. Ernst and the Mackay children joined the raiders round the fire. They were members of the party, and a few years later Ernst Luchtenstein had reason to be thankful that the Hottentots regarded him as a friend.

As a youth Ernst followed several occupations. He started a butchery in Keetmanshoop, slaughtered the cattle, skinned the carcasses and sold them over the counter. He also tried the hotel trade; but found no amusement in serving beer to

drunken German officers until the early hours of the morning. The veld claimed him again and he returned to farming. He was too poor to make a success of it, and up to 1914 he had never earned more than a pound or two a week.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, of course, Ernst Luchtenstein became a German soldier. Both his brothers were captured; but although Ernst’s horse was shot under him in one of the skirmishes in the south, he retreated northwards with the main force and remained in the field until the surrender in July, 1915.

Having lived as he pleased for years, Ernst did not relish the prospect of a prisoner-of-war camp - and he heard that all German soldiers were to be interned. In fact, he ranked as a reservist, and would have been allowed to return to his farm; but he knew nothing of this. “I decided to discharge myself and remain a free man,” Ernst Luchtenstein told me.

A train-load of South African troops was going south - bearded burghers who wore only a

semblance of uniform. Luchtenstein tore off his German badges and shoulder-straps. He had a slouch hat very much like the others wore; he was dressed in war-stained khaki, and when he joined the train he passed as a member of the commando. Just before the train reached Keetmanshoop he jumped off and vanished into the veld.

If you have ever seen the Karas mountains then you can imagine the wilderness in which Ernst Luchtenstein sought refuge. There are two ranges, the Little Karas in the west, most of the peaks not much higher than koppies; and the Great Karas range ten to twenty miles away to the east across a sandy plain. Both ranges rise from a plateau, where the grazing is often good. It was a wonderful season when Luchtenstein arrived, for the summer rains of 1915 had revived the fountains and veldkos was abundant. In a drought year he could not have survived in the Karas mountains.

Nevertheless, life for Luchtenstein was reduced to the simplest terms. It called for endurance far

above the normal, and a month of it would have been too much for many strong men. I tried to discover Luchtenstein's secret, and at last he told me.

"I was never a spoilt child, and comfort meant nothing to me," declared Luchtenstein. "Though I had not a penny in cash, I had something more valuable. When the war started I had buried my own rifle and fifty rounds of ammunition. I took this into the mountains with me."

With only fifty cartridges, of course, Luchtenstein had to be careful. He was prepared to wait until the end of the war in Europe; and like others at that period he thought it would only be a matter of months. Apart from the rifle, his worldly goods consisted of his grey army overcoat, a spear, a few mess tins, and a mongrel dog which had followed him into the mountains.

Luchtenstein trained the dog to hunt dassies. Every day the dassies came down from their rocks to graze; and when the dog raced up to them the foolish dassies tried to hide under small

stones. One dassie, weighing up to three pounds, provided Luchtenstein with enough meat for a day, and the dog lived on the same diet. Luchtenstein baked the dassies and ate them day after day.

On moonlight nights the porcupines emerged from their burrows. They are slow at night, and when Luchtenstein and his dog found porcupines, a blow on the nose finished them. Then there was a change of meat.

Often Luchtenstein made traps from horse-hair, Hottentot traps with a noose for guinea-fowl and partridge. These he set near water-holes. When they failed he made the age-old Bushman trap - a heavy stone supported by a stick, baited with seeds. The stone fell on many a guinea-fowl.

"Meat, meat, meat," recalled Luchtenstein." I had so much meat that I seldom used my rifle. When I did, I never fired more than one shot. You know how it is in the lonely places ... if you hear a sound like a shot it may just be someone breaking a tree branch. But if you hear a second

shot - then you are sure. I crawled up to my game and made certain that my one shot brought down a klipbok or kudu, springbok or gemsbok."

After six months entirely alone in the mountains Luchtenstein saw some Hottentots he had known before the war. Up to that time he had avoided all human beings; he had been on to run to avoid even the possibility of pursuit. Now he felt safer and he came out of hiding and spoke to the Hottentots. They knew nothing about the course of the war; but they gave him milk and later they brought him a goat.

For the meat-satiated Luchtenstein this was luxury. "I built myself a pondok in a lonely kloof and became tame," he told me. "I had a feeling that no one was looking for me ... and the milk was wonderful after all that meat. Tea and coffee I did not miss - they had never become necessities as far as I was concerned, and I still prefer milk."

Luchtenstein had been curing skins to pass the time. He had made several pairs of shoes, using

steenbok leather for the uppers and thick kudu for the soles. He gave his whole stock of skins to the Hottentots in exchange for the goat and felt wealthy indeed.

Then a leopard took the goat. Luchtenstein devised a trap for the leopard, but it was too light and the leopard dragged the trap away. Luchtenstein, smarting from the loss of his goat, followed the trail. He could have shot the leopard, but he preferred to save the cartridge.

“I came round a bush and found myself staring into the eyes of the leopard,” said Luchtenstein. “The trap was between its feet, and I saw it could not spring on me. So I picked up a jagged rock and smashed the leopard between the eyes. Just to make sure, I hit it with my kierre.”

There are no lions in Karas mountains, and the encounter with the leopard was almost the only adventure Luchtenstein could recall. “All animals are harmless until you attack them,” he declares. But he nearly fell over a cliff on one occasion in his anxiety to dodge a spitting cobra.

I asked Luchtenstein whether he ever felt lonely, and he pondered for a long time before he replied.

“Perhaps. I can’t remember very well. Yes, I must have been lonely, because after six months I started visiting friends on farms near the mountains. No one gave me away. They supplied me with a few little things, but my needs were small. I had always led a hard life, and knew almost nothing of home life. Yes, I went to the farms because I wanted to talk.”

At last, after nearly eighteen months in the mountains, Luchtenstein learnt from a Hottentot that the police were inquiring about him. That made him more careful. He ventured across the plain to the Great Karas mountains, a remote range at that time. In those mountains the Bondelswart Hottentots had made their last stand against the Germans, prolonging the war for two years. From those peaks Luchtenstein could scan an enormous area. He could see the old volcano of Brukkaros more than a hundred miles away. Westwards there was the dry bed of the Great

Fish River; and beyond, the Konkiep hills where he had first met the Hottentots. But never was there a sign of pursuit.

Lulled into a sense of security again, Luchtenstein came down from the mountains and rested in a Hottentot's hut. He had not been there for long when he heard horses approaching and knew that he was cornered. Two white police troopers and a native constable entered the hut.

"There's Mr. Ernst," exclaimed one of the policemen. "Man, but we've been looking for you for a long time. There's a military captain in Keetmans who wants to see you urgently."

The policemen were extremely polite, but Luchtenstein thought that was only their pleasant way of dealing with the situation. They lent him the native constable's mule for the journey to Keetmanshoop; and when they camped that night they gave him food and a blanket and did not appear to regard him as their prisoner.

Still Luchtenstein saw the dreaded internment camp ahead of him, and decided to escape, if he

could, during the night. He kept a sharp look-out, but whenever he rose one of the constables was gazing at him. It was a bitter night. At last the constable spoke. "I see you can't sleep either - you must be as cold as I am," he said. There was no way out, and next morning Luchtenstein rode into Keetmanshoop with the police.

He was shown into an office. It was the turning point in his whole life, but he thought his freedom was ended and his thoughts were gloomy. The South African officer behind the desk, Captain Tilley, was in charge of the commissariat. He welcomed Luchtenstein and came straight to the point.

"I want to go out hunting and everyone tells me you are the man who knows where to find the game," said Captain Tilley. "Can you take me to the kudu?"

For years before 1914 Luchtenstein had been the recognised hunting guide of the district - and the finest shot. Yet he was staggered when he heard Tilley's request. He had expected to find himself

behind barbed wire, and here was this offer. Gratefully he agreed.

“You’ll have to look out, or the dogs will go for you,” remarked Tilley as Luchtenstein left the office. With his beard, tattered clothes and rough buckskin shoes he looked a wild man of the mountains indeed.

After the shooting trip Tilley gave Luchtenstein a contract to supply grass for army fodder. That year, like the previous year, the veld was a flower garden and the yellow grass stood high.

“Within five months I had made £2,000 - just by cutting grass,” Luchtenstein told me. “At last I was able to go about farming properly, and only then did I realise that my eighteen months in the wilderness had not been wasted. You see, I had come to know every hectare of the ground among the Karas mountains. Land was cheap in those days. I bought the farms where rain was certain to fall, and when the karakul industry boomed I made a fortune.”

At one time Ernst Luchtenstein owned 400,000 hectares - nearly a million acres. A new system of land taxation was introduced in South-West Africa fairly recently, however, and Luchtenstein found it advisable to reduce his holdings to about 60,000 hectares. The one-man butcher’s shop in Keetmanshoop became a general store with forty-one assistants, and Luchtenstein used to travel by air to New York to buy goods.

Luchtenstein has another claim to fame of which he is not at all proud. In August, 1933, he was on his farm Gammib when he heard that six lions were prowling round his sheep. He went out after them and shot all six with six shots - a record for Africa at the time. “Lions are easy,” declared Luchtenstein when I asked him about it. “Anyone who gets mauled by a lion has been asking for trouble. But a wounded gemsbok - there’s a dangerous animal, much more ferocious than a lion. I only shot those lions because they were after my sheep.”

Throughout his career Luchtenstein has never shown the slightest interest in minerals or

mines. He never prospected the Karas mountains; his eyes were always on the animals, the water-holes and the grass. He could have taken part in diamond prospecting expeditions in the great days of the early discoveries round Luderitz; but he preferred transport riding at a wage of fifteen shillings a week.

In recent years Luchtenstein has often flown over the remote kloofs where he found sanctuary long ago. As the old landmarks appear he thinks of his luck - not the luck that brought him wealth, but something that he avoided when he was a fugitive.

"I was young and inexperienced - and very eager to remain a free man," Luchtenstein explained to me. "During those first few months I hid myself whenever I saw white people in the distance. But I often ask myself what I would have done if I had run into a police patrol. I might have used my rifle ... and then it would have been a very different story."

Luchtenstein was not the only man to disappear into the unmapped spaces of South-West Africa. It happened again during the 1939-1945 War; and not long afterwards I met one of the two German scientists who followed Luchtenstein's example.

Dr. Henno Martin and Dr. Edward Korn, the scientists, were anti-Nazis who left Germany in 1935 and found refuge in South-West Africa. Their blameless records were well known to the authorities, and they were in no danger of being interned when war came. However, the outlook for Britain in 1940 was black; and these two young men knew what their fate would be if Germany won the war. They decided to disappear into a lonely world of their own.

Shaking off civilisation in this way is no simple matter, so Martin and Korn made the transition more comfortable by equipping themselves liberally for their new life. They

loaded a one-ton truck and a car with food for many months; and to occupy their minds they took scientific instruments, cameras and a wireless set. Every detail of their route and “Shangrila” had been carefully planned. By the time their departure had been reported the two men were safe in a mountain stronghold in uninhabited country.

The spot they had selected was a cave in the deep gorge of the dry Kuiseb River near the edge of the Namib Desert. For many miles they had travelled on hard limestone, leaving no tracks. But their masterpiece was the manner in which they crossed the gorge with their vehicles. They negotiated a narrow ledge with a precipice below - a route which, as they expected, their pursuers regarded as impossible. Finally they hid their truck beneath an overhanging cliff, so that it could not be observed from the air, and pushed the car into a small cave.

Many years ago there were Bushmen in the Kuiseb River caves. Thousands of years ago

Neolithic men lived there. Though the river only runs once in a decade, water remains in pools or it may be found by digging through the sand. Animals come to the river bed to drink. Martin and Korn had a pistol, a shotgun and a large stock of ammunition. These weapons were useful for shooting buck for the pot; but the two men had a narrow escape when they were charged by a bull. It was a bull which had escaped from the settled area and run wild. Martin and Korn failed to stop the charge with their firearms, but they had an assegai which finished the bull.

Sometimes they found carp in the muddy pools of the Kuiseb. They started a carp breeding pool near their cave, but the hyenas came at night and stole their fish.

Nine months of this desert “Robinson Crusoe” life passed happily enough. The summer that year was so dry, however, that the last pools in the river evaporated, there were no more fish, and the game moved inland in search of nourishment. Martin and Korn were unwilling

to leave the cave where they had found sanctuary. For a time they pitted their trained minds against the wilderness. When the first symptoms of scurvy appeared they ate the raw flesh of the antelope they shot and cured themselves.

It was the water problem that forced them to move at last. They found barely enough to drink, and in the blistering November heat the hardship of going unwashed was too much for them. The two bearded, ragged men packed their belongings and moved inland after the game.

Now they were back in country patrolled by the police. When they approached a water-hole they wore special shoes which they had made for the purpose - shoes with the hooves of gemsbok fitted to the soles, so that no human imprints were left in the sand. They walked for miles with the aid of this device rather than leave wheel-tracks which might lead the police to their hiding places.

The wireless receiver kept them in touch with the world they had left. They had a wind-charger for the batteries, and the wireless link never failed. But their first Christmas in the wilds was a grim celebration, with stores running low. One can have too much venison; the coffee and sugar had to be strictly rationed; they were tired of lentils. Even a scientist, it seems, cannot always revert successfully to the diet of primitive man.

Wild beasts were often a menace. Once their dog, a mongrel bull terrier, was gored by a gemsbok. One night they found a zebra carcass at a water-hole; and they had only just realised the meaning of their discovery when the leopard which had killed the zebra returned to the feast. Martin, caught with his shotgun unloaded, speared the leopard with the assegai.

At last supplies ran so low that Korn had to drive into Windhoek to buy food. There are many bearded men in South-West Africa, the missing scientists had been forgotten, and so he was able to do his shopping and return to the lonely camp on the Kuiseb.

Soon after this adventure, however, Korn went down with beri-beri - the deficiency disease which follows a long spell on low diet. The fresh supplies he had secured had come too late to ward off the illness. Martin drove his friend to a farm not far from Windhoek, then hurried back to the wilderness.

That was the end of the queer experiment in isolation. Korn had to go to hospital, and the police made him reveal Martin's hiding-place. Both men were fined, though not heavily, for possessing firearms without licence and failing to pay dog tax!

The scientists had not been idle during their voluntary exile from civilisation. They had made hundreds of photographs of wild life; they had discovered Bushman paintings and many other valuable relics of ancient life in South-West Africa. Their topographical survey of the Kuiseb River bed, never previously attempted in detail, was an admirable piece of work.

It is sad to have to record that Korn was killed in a motor accident in 1946. Dr. Martin is serving the government as a surveyor, and when I last heard of him he was helping the Abbe Breuil to solve the riddle of the Bushman paintings in the Brandberg mountains.

CHAPTER 15

ONE NIGHT IN AUS

I AM WANDERING away from the Orange River again, northwards this time, leaving the river at Sendeling's Drift and following the old, rough missionary trail for 120 miles to Aus.

Aus is the German word for "out," and when you reach the mountain village of Aus you are out of the Namib Desert. Yet that easy explanation did not satisfy me. I went deeper into the origin, and found that the Hottentots have a word Aus pronounced with a click, and meaning the "Big Snake." This bowl in the mountains was known to them as click-Aus long before the Germans entered the country.

Nevertheless I was pleased to arrive at Aus from Luderitz, for the first twenty miles of the desert journey ranks as an ordeal. The officer in charge of the Diamond Detective Department escorted me in his jeep and pushed me up a steep sand hill when I stuck. Without that help it would have meant a long struggle with the encroaching dune. One fearsome stretch of sand on this route is called the "lange jammer," the long grief; and another part, where sharp rocks jut up from the sand, has been named "the piggeries."

The Germans spent £10,000 a year on clearing the railway line of sand, and the South African Railways still have to maintain large gangs of shovellers. You can drive through the Kalahari without encountering the sand problems which must be solved on the main road between Luderitz and Aus.

Camels hauling wagons often took a month to reach Aus from the coast in the early days. The ruins of the old forage stations and water depots are still dotted across the desert.

Donkey transport proved more satisfactory; but in 1906 the railway reached Aus and put an end to a chapter of painful pioneering. The mail train takes eight hours to cover the eighty-six miles uphill from Luderitz to Aus. In other words, the time-table has not been altered for forty years.

Aus village, 4,700 feet above sea level, grew up round the railway station. The wooden houses like chalets, and especially the quaint wooden Bahnhofs Hotel, give a Swiss atmosphere to the place. I spent a night at the Bahnhofs, and heard the story of Aus from a man who had lived in the district since 1904 - certainly the oldest white resident. Herr F. P. Izko, with his shaven head, black eyebrows and moustache, peaked cap, leather jacket, beer and cigar, made me see Aus as an outpost of adventure.

It has the coldest winter climate in South-West Africa. Sometimes the snow is three feet deep, and Izko remembers the bitter winter of 1904, when a whole party of trekkers and their oxen

perished in the snow four miles from Aus. Travelling in such weather, Izko covered his camels with blankets and lit fires round them - and then found three dead camels in the morning.

Among other peculiarities of Aus weather are the earthquakes and the windstorms. Izko told me that his wife was thrown off her chair on the farm during an earthquake a few years ago, and the tremor left a six-inch gap in his dam. One windstorm raged almost incessantly for eight months and left the veld bare.

Izko has been a soldier, transport rider, diamond digger and farmer. His farm is fifty-six miles from Aus, but the air is often so clear that he can follow the lights of a car leaving the village. Farms are enormous in this district, for the rainfall of four inches a year does not provide rich grazing. You need 10,000 morgen for your karakuls on the fringe of the Namib at Aus, and one farmer has 60,000 morgen. Izko bought his land at nine-pence a morgen.

Springbok migrated past Aus in millions early this century. They ploughed up the veld with their hooves and destroyed the grazing; so the Germans turned machine-guns on the springbok hordes. Izko saw herds of gemsbok two thousand strong in those days; and you can still find six or eight hundred in a herd near Aus.

The mountains round Aus give shelter to many leopards, and lions have not yet been exterminated. Izko told me how "Sterk Hendrik" van der Merwe, the strong man of the district, strangled a leopard with his bare hands; and how another farmer shot and trapped fifty-six leopards within two years. Twelve years ago Izko was told by his labourers that there was a lion on his farm. His wife would not allow him to go to the spot alone, so she accompanied him - and shot the lion.

But Izko's most desperate encounter was with a gemsbok. He wounded it with his last cartridge and then tried to kill it with a chopper. The gemsbok's horn pierced Izko's leg, and he could not move for six weeks. At last a Bushman named Eikamab, employed by Izko, offered to

treat the wound. He used a queer preparation of herbs and powdered gemsbok horn. Izko was cured.

Eikamab is still on Izko's farm. Four feet in height, he claims (like other elderly Bushmen) to be a centenarian. He was a middle-aged man, says Eikamab, when the trader Luderitz arrived at Angra Pequena. That was in 1883. Long before that he acted as guide for Cornelius, leader of the Bethanie Hottentots, on desert hunting expeditions.

There are Bushman paintings in the mountains round Aus, and ostrich egg shells, beautifully painted, may be picked up in the caves. But to find the homes of wild Bushmen you will have to travel into the lonely mountains between Aus and the Orange River-and even then you will seldom see these elusive little people.

Aus had a large garrison when the Germans were at war with the Hottentots. It is the only place in

South-West Africa immune from horse sickness, and the German cavalry barracks were built there. "In this bar," recalled Izko with pride, "there were four barmaids, all very busy."

The garrison at Aus in 1914, when the South African troops landed at Luderitz and penetrated the Namib, was larger still - possibly 4,000 men. Izko had to climb the isolated mountain called Dikke Wilhelm (after Kaiser Wilhelm II) to set up a heliograph station. The South Africans expected a bitter struggle for Aus; but the Germans retreated after a mere skirmish, and left General McKenzie in possession of this valuable base on the inland plateau.

After the German surrender, Aus Nek, just outside the village, became the internment camp for part of the defeated army. It was so cold in the tents in winter that the Germans received permission to build 500 mud houses. You can still see the ruins of these tiny buildings beside the road at Aus Nek; and it is not hard to imagine the monotonous years that 1,700 soldiers lived through in that bleak spot. The engineers in the

camp built a clock large enough for a town hall, using all sorts of oddments for the machinery. When the clock chimed, as it did every quarter of an hour, the sound rang through Aus a mile and a half away.

There was an aerodrome with a powerful wireless station at Aus Nek as far back as 1914, and a German pilot named Fiedler made a number of flights over the South African lines. During the 1939-1945 War the Aus aerodrome was used again - this time by the South African Air Force squadron patrolling the coast in search of submarines. So the relics of two wars form a roadside contrast; the old mud huts, and beyond them the modern aircraft runways.

Reports of gold in the mountains round Aus started a rush in 1917, but although many claims were pegged, not one was found to be payable. Aus still lives in hopes of gold and copper discoveries. The only profitable mining in the area at present is a graphite deposit.

Aus once had its own mineral water factory, but now the water is sent to Luderitz for bottling. The Aus farms supply Luderitz with mutton, and vegetables are grown on smallholdings in the village.

On the outskirts of Aus I noticed a Red Cross sign, and learnt that this was the little hospital which the late Dr. O. von Lossow started out of his own pocket. This brilliant German surgeon and physician flew to England as a consultant during the last illness of King George V. Soon afterwards, tiring of Hitler, he settled in Luderitz.

Dr. von Lossow, though not really wealthy, made a point of giving his professional services free to everyone. He would not even cash a government cheque. Rich and poor received the same skilled attention. One of his patients had to be sent to Cape Town for treatment, and Dr. von Lossow hired a special railway coach to ensure a comfortable journey. He preferred going on foot to see his patients, and was often observed trudging out to Kolmanskop, a distance of ten miles, carrying his instruments.

All Luderitz subscribed for a gift of silver plate when it was announced that Dr. von Lossow had married the sister in charge of the Aus hospital. The wedding gift was displayed in a shop window. Then all Luderitz mourned when news came that the beloved doctor had been drowned while bathing during his honeymoon. He left £10,000, but he must have spent far more on his patients.

Another sign of benevolence in Aus is the Roman Catholic mission in charge of Father Ball. This elderly man became a priest late in life after a business career. In 1930 he bought the ground on which the mission stands, and received funds to build the church nine years later.

Father Ball lives with his flock in the utmost simplicity. An occasional cigar is his only luxury. He has twenty Bushman children at the mission, and several adults who run away immediately at the sight of a stranger. One old Bushman woman always remains, however, and I saw her sitting in a “skerm” in the courtyard.

There she eats and sleeps, moving indoors only when it rains, and never doing a stroke of work. Father Ball declares that his Bushmen are pure-blooded specimens, and that several scientists have visited the mission to study them. All the native races of South-West Africa are represented among his congregation of more than 250 people.

Finally there is the wooden Bahnhof’s Hotel, so full of character and memories.

Over the door in the bar, where I am sitting with Herr Izko drinking light Windhoek beer, is a magnificent ship model. She is the five-masted *Patosi* in full sail, once the largest sailing ship in the world and the pride of Germany. What is she doing here with a desert between her and the sea? Izko says a bored sailor, interned at Aus, made this model more than four feet in length. It is complete, even to the oars in the lifeboats. Having made it, the sailor exchanged it for a case

of beer. The *Patosi* still gives a nautical touch to this Alpine inn at Aus. The village is full of carvings, woodwork and other oddments from the internment camp.

There are handsome carved chairs in the hotel bar, and a massive sideboard that must have made a wagon-load when it came up from the coast. In the hotel garden, just outside my room, is a round pond with goldfish half covered with lilies and surrounded by bamboo, acacia and desert plants.

I should like to have been in Aus when there were four barmaids serving the beer. Izko says those were great days. Baron von Wolf, the man who built a castle in the wilderness to the north of Aus, stood at this bar and refreshed himself during the long journey to Duwisib. And there was another baron who always wanted to sell his title for a bottle of champagne.

Tonight they are playing chess in the bar. This outpost in the mountains is quiet save for the evil wind that batters against the wooden walls. I

must be thankful, however, for tonight there is no snow. Aus is quiet after its adventurous interludes; but Izko has made me see shadows in the bar. Diamond prospectors, soldiers in field-grey and khaki, transport drivers coming in for their first drink after the fortnight's ox-wagon trek from Luderitz, swaggering Prussian officers and a thirsty old sailor man parting with a year's work for a case of beer.

Aus is only a little village in the mountains, but I would gladly pass another evening in the bar at the Bahnhof's Hotel, listening and picturing the episodes in the life of a pioneer village.

CHAPTER 16

“SPERRGEBIET”

“SPERRGEBIET”, they call the “closed district” of 12,000 square miles that begins just outside Aus. The Germans shut down on this diamond desert nearly forty years ago, and ever since then it has been a forbidden territory. At every entrance notice boards in three languages tell you what happens to trespassers:

WARNING
PENALTY £500 OR ONE YEAR'S IMPRISONMENT
PROHIBITED DIAMOND AREA
KEEP TO THE ROAD
DIAMOND AREA NO. 1
SPERRGEBIET

The area starts at the mouth of the Orange River, and runs up the coast for two hundred miles. Although the port of Luderitz is excluded, you cannot walk outside the town without a permit. All the empty, lifeless country inland for sixty miles lies within the "Sperrgebiet".

You leave the routes between water-holes in the "Sperrgebiet" at the risk of your life. This part of the Namib Desert has been roughly mapped, but beyond the coastal diamond workings, much of it is still unexplored. Permits are seldom granted to anyone outside the employ of the diamond company operating in the "Sperrgebiet". It will remain closed and jealously guarded as long as diamonds are worth working.

I was conscious of receiving a rare privilege when the head of the Diamond Detective Department in Luderitz signed the form which gave me the freedom of the "Sperrgebiet".

"As far as we know," remarked the detective officer, "no one ever gets away with a diamond nowadays. We believe that we have closed every loop-hole. The diamond deposits are all within a few miles of the coast. And it is a cruel coast - you could not land a boat through that surf on more than six days a year. The few sheltered bays are all patrolled. If you come in the other way, the desert is an effective barrier. No one but a fool would attempt to raid the 'Sperrgebiet' nowadays."

I asked the detective about aircraft, and he laughed. "They've tried that, too. One pilot landed on a pan right next to a police outpost. The point is that there are very few places left where diamonds lie about in the open waiting to be picked up. You have to dig away about fifteen feet of sand before you reach the gravel terraces, and by that time the police will have you."



The author enters the forbidden territory of South-West Africa—by special permit

Off the track in this desert, as I have said, it is painfully easy to die of thirst. In the Luderitz graveyard you will find the tombstones of some who have perished. Bodies mummified by the sand, and skeletons, have been found many years afterwards. It is only when the great dunes move onwards, after long periods, that such tragedies are uncovered.

Death from thirst was almost a common event in the early days. More remarkable are the stories told of men who survived the ordeal - especially the story of an artisan named Thieme. It was in 1910 that Thieme set out on horseback from Garub to bore for water. Garub is a railway siding on the edge of the desert. Thieme did not have far to go from the railway; but he sat down for a rest, his horse wandered off, and when he awoke he found that a mist had covered the desert.

Thieme tried to follow the spoor of the horse, but he lost it and lost himself. It would have been far better if he had tracked himself back to the

railway line. He had no water at all, for the ride to the bore-hole should not have taken long.

In a burning desert like the Sahara a man cannot last more than a day or two without water. It was cool in the Namib as Thieme plodded across the sands; but his plight soon became desperate and his thirst was agonising. Here and there he found succulent plants, and tried to lick the mist from their fat leaves.

When the horse returned to Garub, guided by an instinct that Thieme did not possess, a search party set out immediately. The police sergeant in charge picked up Thieme's tracks and noted every frenzied circle the crazy man had made. Often, the searchers found, Thieme had approached the railway line - but never close enough to give him his bearings.

At one point they came upon a pathetic farewell message scratched in huge letters in the sand.

"Thieme's letzte stunde," he had written.
"Thieme's last hour:"

Nine days after Thieme had left Garub, nine full days, mark you, they came upon the demented Thieme. He had torn his chest with his nails. It would be impossible to set down the full detail of Thieme's sufferings. He spent months in hospital before he recovered. No other man, I believe, has lived after spending nine days in the Namib without water.

The most serious thirst tragedy ever recorded in the "Sperrgebiet" occurred in 1925, when a band of 167 natives deserted from the Pomona fields and set off southwards on foot along the coast in an attempt to reach the Union. This meant that they had to cover nearly 150 miles to the Orange River without refilling the bottles they carried.

There were eighty-eight survivors. Police intercepted them on the banks of the Orange River and heard a ghastly tale. Some of the natives had simply fallen and died along the line of the march. Others had thrown themselves into the sea in their delirium.

The police started at once to search for survivors, but a sandstorm had obliterated tracks and the bodies of those who had died. The seventy-nine missing natives remained missing for five years. Then a police sergeant on patrol fifteen miles north of the river came upon eight skeletons. Among the fragments of clothing he collected an old purse containing six shillings, a rusty pocket knife, portion of a £5 note, and a ticket bearing a number. The number was that of one of the missing native labourers. These skeletons were found at a spot the police often passed on patrol; but once again the shifting dunes had been responsible for hiding the tragedy.

A few years later another police sergeant found skeletons forty miles north of the Orange River mouth. There were tins of money among the bones, and also a few stolen diamonds. No doubt more such discoveries will be made at intervals of years as the dunes inevitably uncover their dead.

I drove south to Orange Mouth from Luderitz and visited ghost towns, rusty and abandoned machinery worth millions, diamond areas that have been almost cleaned out; and everywhere I thought of the pioneers who worked in these desolate valleys.

The gate into the “Sperrgebiet” is eight miles from Luderitz. There your escort signs the book held out by a trustworthy old Hottentot, and you enter the forbidden territory. It is worth making a side trip, just past the gate, to Wolf (or Adventure) Bay to see the fur seals on the rocks. No one could tell me how the bay came by those names; but this part of the coast is the only place I know where the seals are tame.

That is easy to explain. Seals are hunted mercilessly on all the islands, and on the mainland at Cape Cross. Because of the diamonds, Wolf Bay has been a sanctuary for nearly forty years. And the seals know it. They find refuge here from Possession Island, from all the reefs and rocks offshore where they have escaped the guns and clubs of the sealing gangs.

Here, far up on the beach, they lie sunning themselves fearlessly; the large bull seals lording it among their harems; the pups playing in the shallows with only their flippers showing as they munch the tender strands of sea bamboo.

Here you can walk up to a lazy, sleeping seal and study it. The huge colonies will become restless and move off sluggishly only when you walk among them. If you approach slowly they are not greatly alarmed. One such colony slid past me over the rocks until there was one solitary little seal left - a black, newly-born pup. I stared at the pup, and then became aware of a movement among the rocks close at hand. The mother seal had not abandoned her pup after all. I avoided touching the pup, for they say that if you do that the mother will not return. As I strolled away mother and pup were united again.

The seals of Wolf Bay are among the great sights of the South-West African coast, and I wish that more people could visit them. You can hear them before you reach the top of the rocky ridge overlooking their beaches. At close quarters

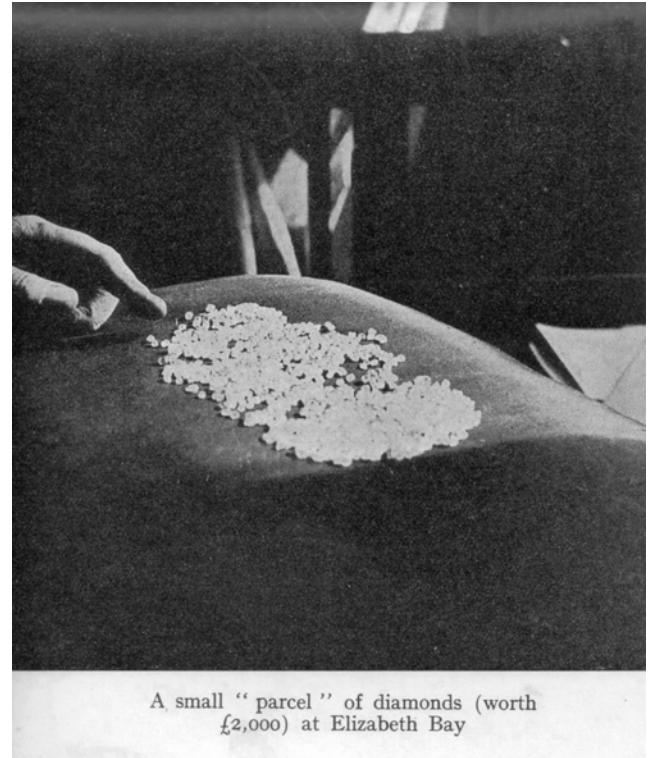
there is always that typical seal odour, hard to define, which would lead you to them in the thickest fog. Always, on open spaces apart from the herd, are the dead seals. They look as though a steam-roller had passed over them. Nothing is left but teeth and hair. This has been a feast for the strand wolf. Nature's way is not so revolting as man's way with the seals, however, and it will be a sad moment if ever the peace and safety of Wolf Bay is broken by the men with clubs.

Not far beyond the seals is Elizabeth Bay, which has a beauty rare in the Namib. The blue curve of the bay relieves the yellow dunes; and no doubt Axel Eriksson, the artist who painted these remote scenes, made a canvas of it. As a diamond enterprise the area has been disappointing. I saw a huge theatre and club, wrecked and stripped of its timber. Streets of houses without roofs, doors, windows or floors-houses from which everything movable had been taken to build the new town at Orange River Mouth. Even the railway line beyond Elizabeth Bay was pulled up during the 1939-1945 War and sent to

Syria for another railway close to the coast. Diamonds are still being recovered on a small scale near Elizabeth Bay. I was shown a parcel worth, perhaps, £2,000, "cleaned up" in ten days. But that is hardly worth mentioning in the same breath as the terraces further south, or the sands where Stauch and other pioneers picked up huge fortunes in the early days. Possibly there will be a more impressive revival at Elizabeth Bay one day. Merensky's Crater was pointed out to me - a black circle of rocks, almost smothered in sand, on a hillside - a crater which has still to be explored. In the meantime the blue bay provides crawfish for the camp at Orange Mouth.

In the German time the diamond diggers lived austere. I noticed a building of peculiar shape at Elizabeth Bay, and was told that it was once a skittle alley. "As long as the Germans had their beer and skittles they were content," remarked my informant.

I was also shown the boiler room where some far-sighted diamond thief salted away a parcel



A small "parcel" of diamonds (worth
£2,000) at Elizabeth Bay

which he was unable to smuggle out with him when he left. No doubt he dreamt about it often enough; but the diamonds were still there years later when the machinery was dismantled. All the way down this coast, wherever diamonds are found, there are supposed to be caches of stolen stones. They are no use to the thieves, and they remain unknown to the diamond companies. Rewards are paid for the recovery of such hoards, however, and sometimes a despairing thief gives the information to a friend and splits the amount received. Often enough the position of the hiding place, which seemed to be so easy to remember, is forgotten. Legends grow out of such incidents, small parcels become fortunes, and greedy men set out on quests which sound romantic, but which may end in prison.

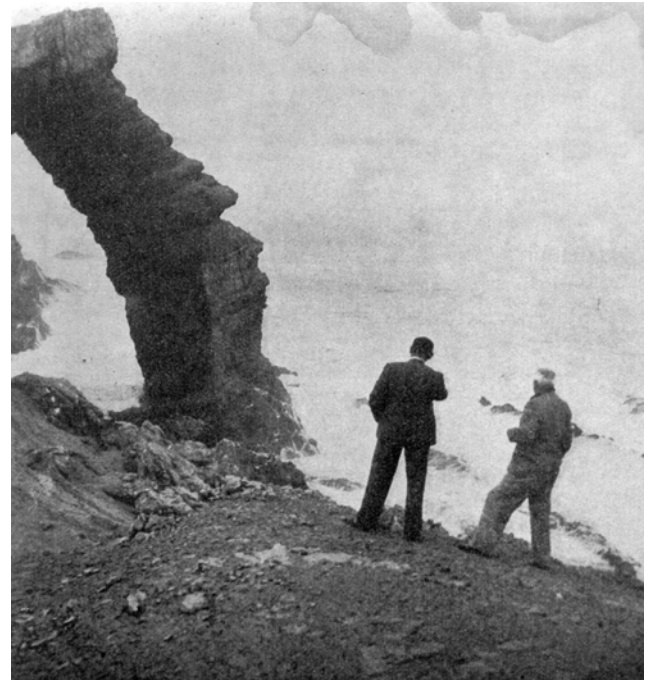
The road southwards finds its way precariously between the dunes and through old workings that were once world famous. At one point near Elizabeth Bay the dunes come right down to the



One of the diamond terraces at Orange Mouth

sea, and there is no way round them. Year after year natives shovel the sand into corrugated iron troughs, and the sand is pumped back into the sea. It is about the most monotonous drudgery I have seen. Elsewhere, when a dune crosses the road, a deviation is made; and in time the dune marches on and the old road can be used again.

Most of the old discoveries appear to have been made in ancient river beds, close to the coast. The Ida Tal was one of these, named by Stauch after his wife. In this fabulous Ida Valley the labourers (Cape coloured men in those days) simply crawled on hands and knees picking the diamonds out of the sand and dropping them into tins slung round their necks. It is on record that 43,000 carats - about a quarter of a million diamonds - were recovered by this method in sixteen shifts. Ida Valley was the richest field in the world at that time. Not far away is the Marchen Tal, the "fairy tale valley" where the diamonds once glittered in the moonlight.



Bogenfels, the rock archway on the
"Sperrgebiet" coast

The most spectacular landmark on the coast is the Bogenfels, the geological wonder marked on British charts as Arch Rock, about sixty miles south of Luderitz. It is a dolomite arch rising sheer from the sea for 180 feet. If there was deep water beneath the arch you could steer a ship under the massive pillar. But the surf breaks dangerously there; the rock is full of faults; and the geologists who went roped down the pillars to examine the formation some years ago must have been fearless and expert climbers. It is an uncanny place. At the base of the arch there is a round, dark tunnel in the rocks large enough for a train. The sea rushes clean through the tunnel.

You can climb to the summit of the Bogenfels easily enough, up an enormous sloping slab about twelve feet thick. There is a peep-hole about half-way up, allowing a dizzy glimpse of the sea breaking far below. Bogenfels was once a sea-cave. Two of the sides have fallen in after centuries of wind and sea erosion. The whole impressive arch must collapse one day.

To a geologist, this area is a scientific paradise. Near the Bogenfels, weird strata are exposed in terraces and raised beaches. The grey sandstone yields bone fragments identified as the skeletons of animals never seen on the coast today rhino, pigs and rodents that roamed in vanished forests and enjoyed a far different climate. Here, too, are marine fossils, the shellfish that lived in warm water instead of the icy seas that lash the Bogenfels. Here are gravels containing agates, brown and red jasper, chalcedony ... and above all, diamonds.

The only picture I have seen conveying something of the gaunt, solitary grandeur of Bogenfels was an oil painting, five feet in length, done by Axel Eriksson in 1917. Work by this artist is highly prized in South-West Africa today. Eriksson, I learnt, owed one of the diamond companies £200, and painted this large canvas to settle the debt.

All along the Bogenfels beaches are deep caves, some of them with roofs like cathedrals. Every tide sweeps into the caves, leaving driftwood and

dead seals, tree trunks from the Orange River, occasionally a ship's raft. I lunched at the mouth of one gigantic cave where tons of earth, rock and red ochre had fallen from the roof. At this spot the weirdness of the wild diamond coast grips you. The steep beaches are littered with the debris of the sea. Round the corner, you imagine, anything might be found washed up - anything from a diamond to a Portuguese galleon wrecked long ago.

Indeed there have been queer finds. The cargo steamer *City of Baroda*, torpedoed in 1942, was abandoned. Not far from Bogenfels is an area of grotesque rocks which look like streets of houses seen in a nightmare. Totenstadt, they call it, "town of the dead." The *City of Baroda* drifted on to the jagged reefs at Totenstadt and broke up quickly. From the beaches the police collected ninety barrage balloons, thousands of tins of English cigarettes and huge wads of Chinese banknotes. The unlucky sergeant who first discovered the banknotes reported his find to Luderitz. He was instructed to make a list of

the numbers and denominations of the banknotes. For once a faithful sergeant refused duty. "It is impossible," he wrote back. "There are so many notes that I cannot even count them - and furthermore I cannot read Chinese."

Bogenfels has been picked almost clean, but traces of old occupation remain. Fresh water was always a problem there, and you can still see the rusting plant on the beach where all the water was distilled. Coal had to be brought by sea, and landed in surf boats, which ran the cost of distilled water up to £9 per cubic metre. White miners were allowed two baths a week, expensive luxuries indeed, but the diamonds paid for everything.

South of Bogenfels the desert relents a little. There is a long, shrub-covered stretch, still desolate, but offering some grazing in good years. You see a steenbok here and there; even herds of gemsbok, and always the jackals. It is an easy run in a touring car nowadays; but the old hands told me of many ordeals. In 1909 it was considered impossible to travel down the

coast beyond Bogenfels to the Orange River mouth owing to the lack of water-holes. There was nothing more direct than the police route, far inland, from Aus to the river; and this journey was accomplished by means of ox-carts with enormous wheels and wide tyres. Twenty years ago these carts were still being used.

Camels made the coastal trip possible - just possible. The first motor cars did not attempt it. At last a track was made for cars, however, and large drums containing food, water and petrol were placed at intervals of ten kilometres. Often enough the drivers had to leave their stranded cars deep in sand and walk to the nearest drum for supplies. The tracks they left may still be seen; even their troubles may be traced in the sand. Like the Libyan desert, the Namib preserves spoors for decades.

Diesel trucks with huge trailers were first put on the run in 1929. They take ten hours for the 187 miles run from Luderitz to Orange Mouth, day after day, year after year, hauling 500 tons a month, carrying everything from lucerne to

heavy machinery. One truck purchased in 1932 has now covered more than a million miles.

At the end of the ride you are back in civilisation, a settlement of four hundred white people, men, women and children, and twelve hundred Ovambo labourers. Here are streets of houses, including many solid, modern homes; a huge electric power station; a club with cinema, squash courts, billiards and a first-class library. The bakery turns out 1,800 loaves a day, the butcher always has meat and there are no shortages in the retail store.

Most things are free at the Orange Mouth settlement. It is remote, but only in such places can a man save three-quarters of his annual income. The company, the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South-West Africa, supplies rent-free, fully furnished houses, free electricity, free paraffin for cooking, free water. One of the most highly-qualified teachers in South-West Africa is in charge of the free school. The free medical service includes maternity expenses - an unusual blessing.

At first it was not easy to retain the full staff in this isolated spot, and when contracts expired men returned to the cities. The growth of amenities, however, has had a settling effect and today about eighty per cent of the white staff return to Orange Mouth after their annual holidays. Where else can a bachelor live well on £6 10s. a month and no extras?

Every bachelor has his own wooden prefabricated house, brought from the abandoned diggings further north. There are "prefabs" for some of the married couples, too, and they like them. Many of these houses were imported from Germany between the wars at a cost of £1,000 apiece. They stand up to one of the most peculiar climates in the world. Orange Mouth is on the same latitude as Kimberley and other hot places; but it is always cool there, and often cold in midsummer owing to the coastal fogs. From November to March a fifty-mile-an-hour wind blows on most days, falling at night. Bluegums, palms, pines and other trees have been planted as windbreaks.

The company has its own farm in the rich river silt on the north bank of the Orange River. Vegetables are supplied at that vegetable rations for the Ovambos may be grown on the spot. Here, too, a dairy herd is being built up. At present the people of Orange Mouth drink tinned milk.

A "country club" on the river bank is being planned. Members of the white community are not kept behind barbed wire; they can visit the river and the sea beaches with few restrictions.

The settlement stands on a non-diamondiferous plateau. Six miles away, near the sea, are the rich marine terraces that have yielded diamonds worth many millions. Equipment costing £1,000,000 has been ordered, and when that is available the present output will be doubled.

I ploughed round the diggings in a jeep with the assistant manager, pushing trucks out of our path, barging through heaps of sand, riding along the trolley lines and grinding over the dunes. "The jeep saves me a five-mile walk every day,"

said my guide cheerfully. As he drove, he showed me how the diamonds are recovered in this far corner of South-West Africa.

The diamond terraces, which are really old, raised beaches, run parallel with the sea. They were lifted with the rising of the land thousands of years ago. As the windblown sand is removed by scoops, the boulders come to light again with their petrified oyster shells. It is queer to watch these ancient, sea-worn gullies emerging from the desert dunes.

Among the boulders are the layers of diamondiferous gravel. This gravel is shovelled into trucks, and finally the rocks are swept with hand brooms so that no diamonds shall be missed.

Ovambo labourers who find diamonds while digging up gravel are rewarded at the rate of 6d. a diamond. During every shift an official of the company rides round on horseback with a collecting box, accompanied by a detective. In this way, on an average, a hundred diamonds are

collected daily. One fortunate labourer made £1 in one shift, but that is rare. The forty diamonds he handed over, of course, were worth more than he could earn in many years.

This amusing system has its drawbacks. If the simple natives are not carefully watched they are apt to spend their time looking for diamonds instead of shovelling gravel. And once a large and valuable diamond was smashed with a hammer by a greedy Ovambo who hoped to receive several rewards for one discovery. The matrix of the shattered diamond could still be seen in the pebbly terrace where it had rested for so long.

However, the system has been retained because it discourages thieving. An Ovambo prefers to receive sixpence, which he can spend at once, to hiding a diamond which will be impossible to smuggle away. Every labourer and all his possessions go under the X-ray plant before he is allowed to leave the "Sperrgebiet" on his way home.

The great bulk of the diamonds, of course, are recovered after the gravel has passed through the jigging plant and the concentrates have reached the sorting table. I have seen this final process in other places, in Kimberley and on the Vaal River diggings; but the sight of the wet pebbles on the sorting table has never lost its fascination for me. Here are the famous "Bantams" again - the brown pebbles of banded ironstone; here is green epidote mixed with jasper and chalcedony, garnets and quartz. On the black table surface the true crystals shine unmistakably. Diamond after diamond is scraped aside and dropped into the locked box. Keen-eyed Ovambos sort the gravel, with a white man in charge of the room.

The record Orange Mouth stone was one of 245 carats - one-third the size of the Jonker diamond, but worth only £4,000 because the colour was bad. Some beautiful colours may be observed in a month's output - pale green, yellow and amber besides the famous blue-white.

"The variety of stones, colours and sizes suggests that these diamonds have not all come

from one source," an expert told me. "Some may have been produced by pipes fairly close at hand. Others, the water-worn diamonds, may have travelled down the Orange River for hundreds of miles."

Geologists still avoid being dogmatic about the origin of the South-West African coast diamonds, though it is no longer the deep mystery it was at the time of the discovery.

This desert coast from Luderitz north to Conception Bay and south to the Orange River is regarded by geologists as the first solid crust ever formed on earth. Here it was, probably, that the molten matter first cooled and solidified, assisted by that icy current from the Antarctic which still meets the hot land winds and covers the coast in a white blanket of fog.

The coast reveals many signs of the gigantic upheavals which mixed it like a pudding before the crust became hard enough to resist the convulsions below. It was well baked after this stirring; you can see that by the coloured rocks

and the oxides of iron. And when everything had calmed down and the coast became a waterless desert, there were diamonds left so near the surface that men scratched for them with their bare hands.

At first the diamonds were found near Luderitz, and the people then believed they were washed up by the sea. Sandy valleys open to the sea were discovered to be rich in diamonds; and those blocked by dunes revealed poor deposits. Diamonds were often found embedded in sea shells.

Eager prospectors scattered far and wide in search of new diamond areas; but right up to the present time no one has found a substantial diamond deposit at a greater distance from the coast than fifteen miles. Solitary diamonds have been found further inland, but it was thought that some had been carried by ostriches.

At first the coastal discoveries were taken as strong evidence in support of a marine origin. The diamonds of the South-West African coast

are of a type entirely different from those of Kimberley and the South African river diggings; they are smaller and more brilliant, even when uncut. Their purity is remarkable.

German geologists who investigated this sudden windfall in the hitherto barren colony in 1908 put forward another possible explanation of the presence of diamonds. The southern boundary of the colony was formed by the Orange River, and it was suggested that the diamonds could have been swept down to the sea by that great stream and then carried north along the coast by the Antarctic current and distributed while the land was still submerged.

This theory received strong support in 1927, when the great treasure chest of diamonds was opened at Alexander Bay, just south of the Orange River. It was simple to deduce that a similar deposit should be found on the north bank. Close to the pits sunk nearly twenty years previously, the Orange Mouth diamond terraces were located. Ever since then there have been busy diamond workings within sight of each

other on the north and south banks of the Orange River.

It is clear that the Orange River had other outlets to the sea long ago. Near the present mouth Dr. E. Reuning, the geologist, found another arm of the river leading towards the sea in a northerly direction. That was in 1909; and, as I shall relate, this early prospecting almost revealed the Orange Mouth diamonds nineteen years before the actual discovery was made. Dr. Reuning was compensated for his ill fortune on that occasion when, in 1927, he went to Namaqualand to investigate the reports of diamonds there. Financed by Merensky, Reuning opened up the great Alexander Bay oyster terraces - one of the world's great diamond fields.

There are still geologists who believe that some of the diamonds originate in a submerged "parent rock" off the coast, and that they are carried along a "pipe" to the shore. In the early days the German Government accepted this theory and by Imperial decree vested all rights in

diamonds on the sea floor in the colonial treasury.

A South African syndicate was then formed to dredge for diamonds. They lost their ship while steaming at full speed from a pursuing German gunboat in dense fog; but not before one solitary diamond had come up in the bucket.

There were rumours that diamonds had been found on the British-owned guano islands situated close inshore. The Cape Government sent a prospector to Possession, the largest island. He struck diamonds immediately below the layer of guano left by the sea-birds. It was not a rich deposit, however, and in the end the authorities decided that it would be more profitable to leave the birds undisturbed.

Most of the diamonds were undoubtedly brought down by the Orange River. The swift, north-flowing current probably took some of them to the islands. There may be diamond craters awaiting discovery in the "Sperrgebiet"; the jeeps were out searching for one, without

success, just before my visit. But the origin of the diamonds no longer arouses hot controversy. South Africa's greatest river carried these riches down to the sea.

Wherever you look on the first map of the "Sperrgebiet," printed in Berlin in 1913, you will find the zig-zag routes of Georg Klinghardt. These long tracks pass through ghastly, waterless country. A glance at that map is enough to prove that Klinghardt was a true explorer. As I studied the map I longed to know more about the almost forgotten man.

He might have been entirely forgotten if his name had not also appeared on the modern map, where the remote Klinghardt Mountains rise from the desert twenty miles from the coast at Bogenfels. Fortunately I was able to trace one of his daughters, Mrs. L. P. Fourie of Port Nolloth, and gather something of his career.

Klinghardt's parents were German missionaries who settled in Little Namaqualand, and the explorer was born there about the middle of last century. In 1897 Klinghardt decided to start farming at Kubub; and he set out with his wife and young family with livestock and wagons. Mrs. Fourie, then seven years old, remembered the dangerous journey vividly.

They crossed the Orange River at Raman's Drift. Not far from Seeheim the family lingered for a while and built a mud hut; and there another daughter was born. Keetmanshoop at that time consisted of the mission and one store. In this wild and thirsty country the Klinghardt family almost came to grief, for the cattle died during the last stage of the journey and even the children suffered from thirst. There was water at Kubub, however, and they lived in their wagons until Klinghardt had built a house.

Still restless, Klinghardt started travelling again as a "smous" in the employ of the trader at Luderitz. It was the love of seeing new places rather than the money that sent him off in his ox-

wagon; and he carried an ancient box-camera with his trade goods. Mrs. Fourie accompanied her father on some of these journeys. Klinghardt made friends with the Bethanie Hottentots, for they hunted in the coastal desert and knew where to find water.

The discovery of diamonds in 1908 gave Klinghardt his chance. One of the companies engaged him as prospector and surveyor; and then, for months at a time, he disappeared into the unmapped desert south of Luderitz. Always, when he emerged with his wagon, his horses or his camels, he had found new water-holes and conscientiously mapped his routes. Some of his journeys were made through such remote stretches of the "Sperrgebiet" that no one has followed those routes from that time to this. Even the jeeps will take a long time to obliterate the wagon-tracks of Georg Klinghardt.

On one journey Klinghardt returned to Luderitz with diamonds worth £10,000. He showed his daughter (Mrs. Fourie) the stones, and told her that an illicit diamond buyer had just made an

offer for them. Then he handed the whole parcel over to his employers. Everyone I met who had known Klinghardt spoke well of him. The highest tribute came from Dr. Reuning. "He was a grand man, an idealist, yet determined - and never happy unless he was going where no man had set foot before," declared Reuning. "I was young and new to the country when I first travelled with Klinghardt, and he was a father to me."

Klinghardt's most valuable discovery, of course, was the diamond field at Bogenfels. If he had not been in the pay of a company it would have made him a millionaire. As it was, he retired on pension of £10 a month.

"Those days with Klinghardt in the 'Sperrgebiet' were the best days of my life," Reuning told me. "After a time we travelled separately, but we always arranged our journeys so that our trails would meet. I could rely on Klinghardt and he could rely on me. We started with only the chart of the coast - everything inland was blank. Every day we took compass bearings and noted the

distances. We met at unknown, nameless places and gave them names.”

One day in 1910 Reuning and Klinghardt met near Sendeling’s Drift, where there was a German police station on a high terrace above the river. They had always been hospitably received there, and they were looking forward to a glass of beer with the policemen. On arrival, however, they looked in vain for the wooden huts. The hillside was bare.

Under the kameeldoon trees on the river bank they found the homeless police. Then they learnt that a whirlwind had swept along the Orange River a few days before. The police were at lunch, sitting at a table between the huts with only a light shelter over them. In a trice everything was whipped away, and finally they saw their shattered dwellings plastered across a valley a hundred yards away.

Towards the end of 1909 Reuning surveyed the coastal route to the river, having arranged to

meet Klinghardt at the mouth. They planned to spend Christmas Day there together.

Reuning’s trek lasted longer than he had expected. His camels were finished when he reached the mouth; they had been ten days without water. Reuning and Klinghardt had their Christmas celebration on January 1st, 1910, and then set off up the Orange River together. But before they left the mouth they investigated the land just north of the river for diamonds. There was one farmer living on the north bank, “Giel” Louw of Sandkraal. Reuning laid out a series of prospecting pits and engaged Louw to dig them. He intended to return and examine the gravel later. “Dig until you strike rock or water,” Reuning instructed Louw.

Reuning and Klinghardt then travelled up the Orange River, mapping and prospecting the country as far as Sendeling’s Drift. A messenger intercepted them there, and Reuning had to return to Luderitz immediately to take charge of pegging hundreds of claims on the fields further north.

“Giel” Louw sank the shafts and received payment for his work. But Reuning never returned to wash the gravel. If he had done so, he might have found the diamond terraces which have yielded millions since the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South-West Africa started work there about twenty years ago. The old map made by Reuning and Klinghardt is a fascinating piece of work. I have a section of it; the whole map would cover a wall, with its scale of two kilometres to the inch. Across the empty spaces run those old trails ... Klinghardt ... Reuning ... Klinghardt ... Reuning ... through the “wander dunen,” across the dry plains, over ghastly sand tracks, skirting the mountains, following waterless river beds, but always converging at last just as Reuning had told me, always meeting beside the river or deep in the “Sperrgebiet.”

They took some of those desperate routes together, and they travelled light-heartedly as they made their discoveries. I doubt whether the men in jeeps find the same satisfaction in their work as did Klinghardt and Reuning, camping

out week after week with their camels. “Those days with Klinghardt in the ‘Sperrgebiet’ were the best days of my life.”

CHAPTER 17

BUSHMEN OF THE “SPERRGEBIET”

ONLY A BUSHMAN could live on the resources of the “Sperrgebiet,” but I found few people there who knew anything about the Bushmen.

In the German time their presence was known only to one or two explorers. Klinghardt was aware of them; but he kept their secret. A geologist who travelled with Klinghardt in 1909 told me of the queer compact which Klinghardt made with the Bushmen.

Klinghardt employed a native, half-Hottentot, half-Bushman, named Hossob; and Hossob acted as intermediary. The geologist and Klinghardt never caught a glimpse of the Bushmen. Hossob would go into the mountains with coffee and tobacco, pipes, knives and cloth. After a few days he would return with Bushman amulets, necklaces of ostrich shell, engraved ostrich egg

painted red and black, and bags of antelope leather. Klinghardt was allowed to use some of the Bushmen's water-holes, but never above a certain level in the mountains.

Klinghardt observed this queer agreement scrupulously and never mentioned the presence of the Bushmen to the police. Some time later, however, another surveyor went into the area and used the Bushmen's water-holes without permission. The surveyor's camels died, and the man would have been poisoned, too, but for the fact that he had dug deep into the sand for his water, below the poisoned layer.

Hossob seldom failed to provide Klinghardt with meat. One day the geologist saw Klinghardt giving Hossob a rifle and two cartridges. "You must bring one cartridge back," instructed Klinghardt. To their surprise, Hossob staggered into camp with a steenbok on his shoulders and handed back both the cartridges. He had run the buck down on foot, just like a Bushman.

Josef Peters, an old prospector who spent thirty-three years in the "Sperrgebiet," told me that he saw only one Bushman during that period. In 1918 he was at Stauch's Lager, a diamond camp near the coast. This is one of the rare places where a little fresh water was found by digging a well. One day an Ovambo labourer ran to Peters saying that Bushmen had chased him away from the water.

Peters rode out on horseback, and was in time to see five Bushmen disappearing into the dunes. One remained, a sick Bushman who could not run. Peters gathered that the other Bushmen would never have revealed themselves in this way; but they had been out hunting far from their sanctuary in the mountains; and when one was taken ill they decided to leave him at the water-hole.

A surprising discovery was made when Peters searched the sick Bushman. His possessions consisted of a bow and arrow, and six British sovereigns, Peters sent a message to the police, for the Bushman ranked as a trespasser - even

though he had been born and brought up beyond the law in that desert. The police were escorting the wizened little fellow to Luderitz when he escaped, and he was never recaptured.

"I am still wondering where the Bushman found those six sovereigns," declared Peters. "Certainly he had no idea of the value of them."

On another occasion the German police arrested a party of Bushmen as trespassers, and handcuffed them. Every prisoner escaped that night, leaving the handcuffs behind. Bushmen have such slender wrists that no handcuff made can hold them for long.

I heard of one other man who organised trade with the Bushmen. He was a prospector named Huissmann, working on the Bogenfels fields - the most southerly diamond deposit known in the German colonial days. Huissmann's wife collected succulent plants, the queer little growths found in the desert. An Ovambo native supplied her with succulents of many varieties. Mrs. Huissmann asked him how he secured so

many specimens, and the Ovambo explained that he got them from the Bushmen.

Like Klinghardt, Mr. and Mrs. Huissmann never saw the Bushmen. They simply gave the Ovambo tobacco and matches, and the Bushmen brought the plants.

After the 1914-1918 War the police believed that all the Bushmen in the "Sperrgebiet" had died or trekked away to other hunting grounds in the east. They were there all the time. I heard the dramatic story of the discovery of the Bushmen from Sergeant Johannes Willem van Zyl of the South African Police.

Van Zyl patrolled the "Sperrgebiet" for seventeen years. He is a lean, greying man in the late 'thirties; he joined the old South-West Africa Police in 1928, and he has spent most of his life in lonely places. Van Zyl has left his name on the secret map of the "Sperrgebiet" used by the police. This is the only map of the diamond desert on which the water-holes are marked. If diamond raiders knew where to find water their

journeys would be much less hazardous. “Van Zyl’s Water” is somewhere in the remote Aurus Mountains, and Van Zyl found it while he was rounding up the last band of Bushmen.

It happened in June, 1931. Van Zyl, then a constable, was stationed at Chameis, a desperate little wooden hut in the dunes seventy-five miles north of the Orange River, and not far from the coast. Chameis was probably the most depressing police post in South-West Africa, and few men were able to stand the isolation for long. It has since been closed down, though the huts are still there in case they are needed. Van Zyl was one who lived at Chameis without applying for a transfer. “When I felt the monotony getting me down,” he said, “I just went out and admired the beauties of nature - the gemsbok and springbok, steenbok and occasionally the leopards.”

To Chameis came a report that a Hottentot had been murdered by Bushmen in the Aurus Mountains. Another Hottentot had escaped and given the news of the murderers to the police.

At the time the police were unaware that there were any Bushmen left in the “Sperrgebiet”. Bushmen are still found in the northern parts of the territory and out to the east in the Kalahari. But as far as the police knew, the only human beings in the “Sperrgebiet” were employees of the diamond company.

Van Zyl was instructed to ride from Chameis eastwards across the trackless desert to another remote police post, Wittputz, eighty-five miles away. He was told to choose a day when the hot east wind was not blowing; for in a sand-laden east wind the horses would not last out. Sergeant Scheepers at Orange River Mouth wrote to Van Zyl: “I doubt whether you’ll make it on horseback, for there is no water - but see what you can do, and turn back in good time if you can’t reach Wittputz. Look out for tracks of Bushmen.”

To Van Zyl this dangerous mission came as a welcome break in the monotony. He set out one afternoon with a Herero tracker named Johannes, two horses and a pack mule. The weather

appeared to be favourable. Van Zyl planned to ride through most of the first night, for although it was winter, and cold on the coast, he knew that the days inland would be unpleasantly hot.

After riding for some hours, Van Zyl decided to camp in the sand. His first problem arose when he failed to find trees to tie up the animals. Finally he used a forage bag filled with sand. The horses were restless, however, and Van Zyl could not sleep. That was the first of several sleepless nights.

By next afternoon they had reached the Aurus Mountains, forty miles from Chameis, a range with peaks over 3,000 feet high. The horses scented water, but the hole contained only a few drops and it smelt like sulphuretted hydrogen. There, however, the Herero made a discovery - the unmistakable imprints of tiny Bushmen feet.

Van Zyl looked round for inspiration, but he saw only the high mountains. He had a clue; but at that moment he did not feel disposed to

follow it. An hour before sunset he rode on towards Wittputz. A stronger police expedition, he thought, would be necessary to catch the Bushmen.

But again the Herero pointed out human spoors, and this time Van Zyl could see they went into flat country, towards a loose koppie. He sensed that there were Bushmen in the koppie. "Now we must get them," Van Zyl told Johannes. "Ride round the koppie and I'll go into the rocks after them."

Van Zyl was fully aware of the risk he was taking. At any moment a poisoned arrow might come singing out of the rocks, and then he would meet the most painful death imaginable, with no hope of recovery. Nevertheless, he carried his revolver in his hand and moved resolutely towards the koppie.

All he found were tracks. The footprints emerged from the rocks at last and went towards flat country, where there were a few low bushes. Mounting his horse, Van Zyl

rushed across the flats. Even then he might never have seen the Bushmen, but their dogs jumped up and attacked the mule.

Bushman dogs are fierce mongrels. Usually they are trained to silence; but evidently the dogs regarded the mule as their prey and leapt to the feast. One shot from Van Zyl's revolver drove them off.

"The Bushmen thought I was firing at them, and they stood up and surrendered," Van Zyl told me. "Johannes the Herero knew enough of the Bushman language to order them to drop everything. They obeyed, and I felt easier in my mind."

There were three Bushmen, one aged about twenty, and two boys. They had been hunting, armed with bows, arrows and spears, and accompanied by eight dogs. Johannes questioned them and learnt that they were using snake venom for their arrow poison.

Van Zyl then mentioned the murderers, and the Bushmen replied immediately that they knew the wanted men. They were up in the mountains.

It was growing dark, but Van Zyl was determined to arrest the murderers. Taking the halters from the horses, he bound the arms of the eldest Bushman and told him to lead the way. Van Zyl realised that he might be entering a trap, and at first he thought it advisable to arrive at the Bushman camp in the darkness and take the main body by surprise.

There were kokerboom trees at the foot of Aurus Mountain. There Van Zyl handcuffed the two Bushman boys and tied up the animals. The dogs were securely fastened, too, and then the Bushman guide, Van Zyl and Johannes climbed steadily towards the summit.

"It was so cold that I would have enjoyed a rest round a fire," recalled Van Zyl. "That was impossible. I told the Bushman that if he led us astray I would shoot him, and he understood. At three in the morning the moon came up, but it

was not light enough to reveal very much. Towards daybreak the Bushman indicated that we had not much further to go.

“I told the Bushman to lead me straight to the murderers. The rocks were steep and I had to take off the Bushman’s handcuffs. Johannes knew as well as I did that we were in a perilous position, and complained that we would be shot with arrows. Still, he followed me and acted as interpreter.”

On the way to the Bushman camp the guide revealed a large pool of good water, the one which now bears Van Zyl’s name. Some distance further on the Bushman stopped behind a small tree and pointed towards a flat, bushy stretch at the base of the final peak.

“Smoke,” said the Bushman. Peering through the bushes, Van Zyl saw the camp fires and “skerms.” Johannes took charge of the guide at this point and Van Zyl rushed forward with his revolver towards the “skerm” where the murderers were sleeping.

“Dogs attacked us again, and I shot another dog,” said Van Zyl. “Two Bushmen had jumped up, but they fell flat at the sound of the shot and I had no difficulty in handcuffing them. They were shivering with fear. Now I wanted the rest of the band. Led by the murderers, I reached a higher camp and found the women and children. I told them to call the men back. The women screamed, and soon I had the lot.

Counting the boys I had left at the foot of the mountain, there were seventeen men, women and children.”

Van Zyl collected all the bows and arrows and then the whole party marched down to the spot where the Bushman boys and the horses had been left. That was Van Zyl’s second night without sleep. He had a meal and rested; but he was uneasy, for the horses were thirsty and he wanted to take the crowd of prisoners to Wittputz without delay.

Johannes rode ahead alone with a message to the Wittputz police station asking for a stronger

escort, food and water. Van Zyl followed later. He put the weaker Bushmen and the women and children in front. The handcuffed murderers brought up the rear. All that morning the strange cavalcade trekked westwards. Then Van Zyl called a halt and fed the horse and the mule.

An awkward incident occurred when the horse and the mule wandered away, and were again set upon by the dogs. Fortunately, the young Bushman who had guided Van Zyl up the mountain had remained helpful. He drove off the dogs and brought the animals back.

Van Zyl saddled and trekked on. One old Bushman woman kept complaining that she was tired and lame. She held up the column until Van Zyl had given her a cigarette. Progress was slow, and in the evening they were still eighteen miles from Wittputz. By this time, however, they had reached the edge of the "Sperrgebiet". On an abandoned farm Van Zyl found an old cattle kraal formed by a circle of thorn bushes. He settled his prisoners inside the kraal, lit a fire and stood guard at the entrance.

At nine that night Johannes returned with a constable and supplies. Even then Van Zyl found that he could not relax. It was his third sleepless night.

The Bushmen were handed over to the Wittputz police at eleven next morning, but Van Zyl's responsibilities had not ended. The station is 86 miles from the village of Aus, on the railway line. Van Zyl had to hire a car from a farmer, drive to Aus, report the capture of the Bushmen to the police officer at district headquarters in Luderitz, and ask for instructions. He reached Aus after a fourth night without sleep.

The police officer did not visualise the position over the telephone. "Bring in the Bushmen and camels," he told Van Zyl. "The police at Aus will help you."

Van Zyl and the Aus police solved the problem by hiring a motor lorry, paying for it out of their own pockets. That night Van Zyl slept well, in the knowledge that his troubles were over.

Early next morning the Bushmen experienced the first motor drive of their lives. Later in the day they saw a train for the first time, and travelled in it down to Luderitz. "They were sick with fright," said Van Zyl. "I told them that, apart from the murderers, they had nothing to fear, but they had never been in civilisation before and I could not console them."

At Luderitz, seaport for the southern districts of South-West Africa, the whole population turned out to stare at the wild Bushmen. The women and children had been left at a Roman Catholic mission at Aus; the bewildered men were led off to the police station.

Only the murderers, however, were sent for trial. The others were informed that they could not live in the diamond area, although they had been born and brought up in the remote Aurus mountains without anyone being aware of their presence. Work was found for them on farms in the Aus district, and they were released.

At the murder trial the judge pointed out that wild Bushmen could not possibly know anything about the law. He sentenced each murderer to eight months hard labour.

After the first rains most of the Bushmen disappeared from the farms where they had been working. One old woman remained at the mission; the others vanished after the manner of Bushmen.

"The horse I rode during that memorable journey died in September, 1946," Sergeant Van Zyl told me. "It had crossed the Namib desert 350 times on patrol, and had covered 33,000 miles."

I asked Van Zyl where the Bushmen were living now.

"Probably they're back in the 'Sperrgebiet'", he said with a laugh. "They were living happily on game, ostrich eggs, honey and roots - and there are other places where they can find a diet like that. All I can say is that they did not return to Van Zyl's Water. I was there the

other day, leading an official expedition in search of a diamond crater which someone had reported seeing from the air. We found neither crater nor Bushmen.”

Van Zyl paused reflectively.” You never know with Bushmen,” he said at last. “I was lucky to find them, lucky to arrest them without getting a poisoned arrow in my ribs. Queer little creatures - they may be anywhere now. Good luck to them.”

CHAPTER 18 TO THE RIVER’S END

NOW I HAVE reached the end of the Groot Rivier. I always felt that one day I would come to this weird and misty region, known to so few South Africans, where the Orange meets the ocean. And I was certain that I would find what I sought here, just as surely as I found it along the distant loops of the river, at the falls and on the islands.

Driftwood and drama flow down the Orange River to the very end. A jeep has brought me

from the north bank on to the great sand bridge across the mouth. Other rivers have their sand bars, but this bridge is a natural wonder worth travelling all the way from Union’s End to see. Now even the jeep can go no further. The cold South Atlantic is breaking against the steep sand barrier on one side; the familiar, muddy water laps the other; and in front of the jeep is the gap in the bridge, not very wide, where the river is pouring into the ocean.

I would have come all this way from Union’s End to see the mingling of the waters. But for me this is more than a spectacle. I can watch the whole past and trace the complete journey. All the people who have landed here; all who have lived here; all the far corners I had to see before I was drawn inevitably to this final bridge of sand.

Diaz is standing in towards the shore to anchor in the shelter of the cape which he called Voltas, a few miles to the south of the river ... Three centuries pass, and Colonel Robert Gordon comes by wagon. He is a Dutch explorer of Scottish descent, and he names the Orange

River - not for its colour, but in honour of the royal house of the Netherlands ... And now Captain James Alexander comes on the scene, hunting, prospecting, searching for harbours, and leaving the ruins of a stone building that I can see dimly on the south bank ... Half a century goes by, and Adolf Luderitz is rowing past the sand bridge in an open, canvas boat on his ill-fated voyage ...

Two adventurous brothers once made their homes near the river mouth. One was Hendrik Louw, who prospered and built up the fine farm Grootderm on the south bank. His red-bearded brother “Giel” Louw lived at Sandkraal on the north bank until the Germans proclaimed the “Sperrgebiet” and turned him out.

The Louws were orphans. Hendrik worked on a farm until he was twenty-one. Then, in 1888, he trekked northwards on foot with a Martini Henry rifle, a thousand cartridges and a red pack-ox named Dansbok, to become a hunter in the wild Orange River territory.

Hendrik Louw shot ostriches at a time when the feathers were fetching £36 a pound. At first he was so poor that he could travel only with the pack-ox; and his cartridges were so precious that when he fired he dared not miss. Often he crossed the Orange River to trade with the Hottentots. South-West Africa had only just become a German protectorate; the Hottentots were still robbing and murdering travellers and Louw took his life in his hands on these expeditions. But the lazy Hottentots welcomed Louw when he brought them ostrich biltong, and gave him jackal and leopard skins in exchange. Then Louw would return to Port Nolloth with his pack-ox loaded with skins and sell them to the Cornish miners working for the Cape Copper Company. With the money he bought handkerchiefs, pocket-knives, tobacco, shirts and nails. Back he would trudge to the Orange River and beyond - to the Hottentot kraals where two shirts were worth an ox; where a sheep could be had for one handkerchief.

Again and again Louw risked death from thirst when he travelled far from the Orange River on foot. There were only the water jars carried by Dansbok between him and death. The faithful ox lived on t'samma and wild cucumbers. After a time, however, his dangerous journeys showed huge profits and he was able to buy a wagon.

Hendrik Louw was a rich man when he died, but he always regarded himself as an extremely stupid man because for years he missed a fortune under his nose. This is the way he told the story to his old friend Senator W. P. Steenkamp :-

“You know the richest part of an ostrich is the stomach - the soft meat, four inches thick, that tastes better than ox-tongue. Well, I cut open thousands of ostriches in the old days. There were great herds of them near the coast at Alexander Bay. Often I found bright stones in the stomach, and I just threw them away. Yes, for years I was finding diamonds and I never recognised them.”

As a farmer at Grootderm, Oom Hendrik lived in isolation for several decades. He was, in fact, the last farmer in the Cape, situated as he was on the banks of the Orange River estuary with the desert stretching away to the north, south and east. Apart from his brother “Giel,” his nearest neighbour up the river was two hundred miles away.

There was always life in the estuary, however - flamingo's, wild duck and other birds in thousands. Louw kept horses and sheep on the islands in the estuary. Many tales are told of his prowess as a swimmer and his daring exploits rescuing cattle when the river came down in flood.

Hendrik Louw sold his farm Grootderm at a high price as a result of the diamond discovery. He died on a farm near Springbok, Namaqualand, early in 1947 at the age of eighty.

Up to the last Hendrik Louw fired a shot occasionally. As he always said: “The crack of a

rifle is the finest music I can hear - it reminds me of my young days.”

“Giel” Louw also had a large family. As I have related, he did the first prospecting on the north bank diamond terraces. He never became rich, but like his brother he was full of character. Senator Steenkamp told me that he had breakfast with “Giel” years ago, and the main dish was a roast flamingo.

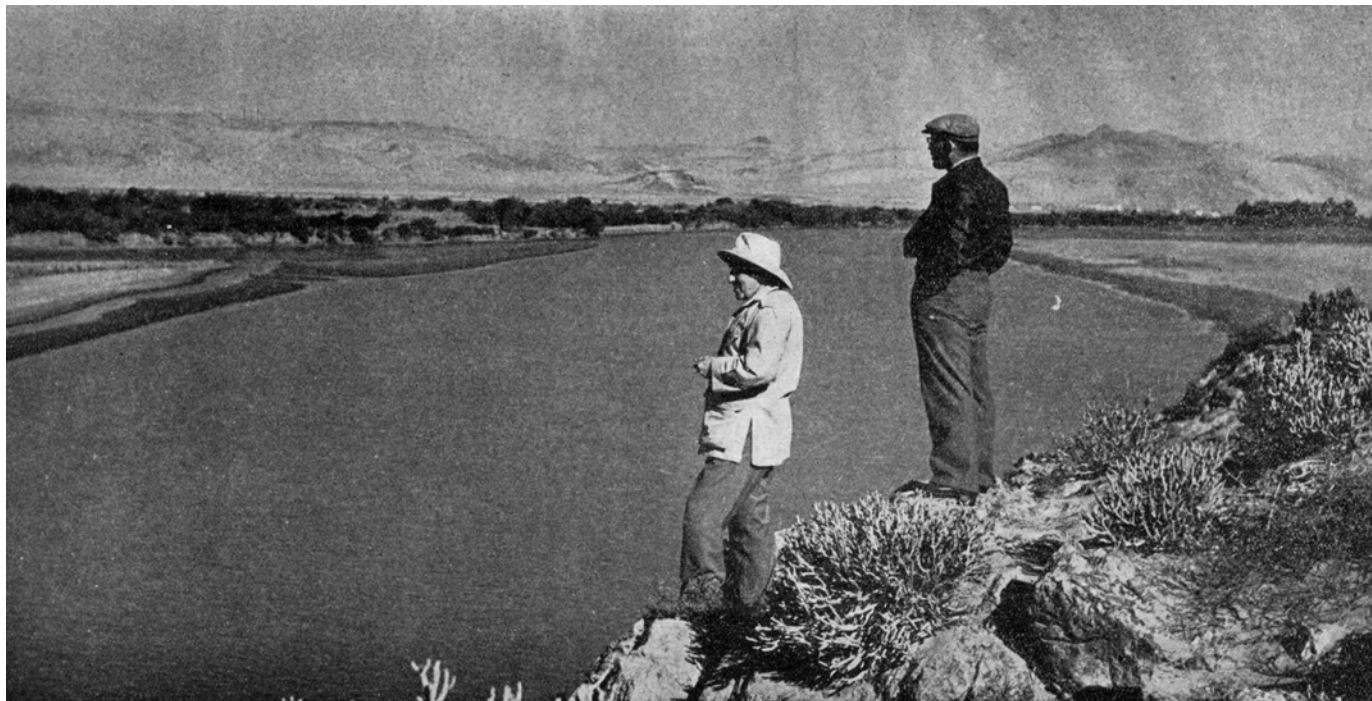
Opposite the old farm of Hendrik Louw is a turreted German police station with a grim story. The roof has gone, the walls are decaying, but the police station at Hohenfels still has something of a frontier atmosphere in its ruined rooms.

Built early in the century, Hohenfels guarded the border for hundreds of miles. From there German policemen with bristling moustaches and sabres rode along the river as far as the tremendous canyon where the Lorelei mountain

rises above the dry ranges. Its first purpose, as far as I could gather, was to prevent the Richtersveld Hottentots from crossing the river and joining the rebellious Bondelswarts. Later the camel patrols from Hohenfels kept diamond raiders out of the “Sperrgebiet.”

It is a lovely setting for a background of tragedy. The high rock which gave the place its name juts up sheer from the Orange River for eighty feet. The water washes its base and succulents grow on the summit. From there you can gaze at the purple, serrated Tatasberg, Cornell’s Berg, Richter’s Berg and Kuboosberg. Bluegums planted by the Germans are now a hundred feet high. Monkeys scamper in the river thickets.

That view holds you. Beyond Grootderm farm, with its green, irrigated patches, are the dunes, and beyond the dunes is the scorching Richtersveld where so many prospectors have toiled. Curving out of sight goes the river with



The Orange River at Hohenfels (the "haunted police station") fifteen miles from the mouth

its mudbanks, and always with its broken lines of trees.. Westwards there are the last bends in the river, the wide mud flats, the last islands, the sand bridge and the sea. It is fifteen miles to the mouth, but even here, in the great hush, you can sometimes hear the breakers; and when the wind is right the salt air reaches Hohenfels. The Germans liked to select dramatic sites for their buildings, and this is one of them.

There were eleven large rooms in the police station, and two stoeps. Above the building was a tower with loopholes - the place is marked Fort Hohenfels on one of my old maps. Close by is the camel stable. They had no direct route to Luderitz; the policemen rode up the river to Sendeling's Drift, and then turned north to Wittputz and Aus. It was called the "old German transport road," and it followed the water-holes along the fringe of the Namib. A man on camel-back must have been pleased indeed to come to the end of his journey at Hohenfels.

Behind the police station are enormous sand dunes. I rode over them in a jeep, grinding uphill in extra low gear, slewing sideways at times, with a jackal watching and gemsbok racing away from the invader. It is wild country now. In the German time it was remote even in this land of lonely outposts. Seventeen miles up the river from Hohenfels is Dabberas, which was once a farm. I could find no trace of the mud house where the farmer lived, but his grave is there. One day the farmer returned from Aus with his wagon loaded with stores. Then the Hottentots came over the river and murdered him for his coffee and tobacco.

Hohenfels, as I have said, has its own ghastly story. The sergeant stationed there had his wife and daughter with him. After a time the girl was sent to school in Germany. Her mother died at Hohenfels while she was away, and the lonely sergeant arranged for his daughter to return.

When she arrived at Hohenfels she found her father living with a Hottentot woman. It was an

intolerable situation, and the girl and the Hottentot were always quarrelling. The end came while the sergeant was out on patrol one Friday. There was a more violent quarrel than usual, and the girl took up a chopper in the kitchen and killed the Hottentot woman.

They say that every Friday night at Hohenfels you can hear the old quarrel, the screams and the fatal blows. Sergeant Van Zyl, the man who found the Bushmen, told me he had slept there often while out on patrol. "The place is full of bats," said Van Zyl. "I heard strange sounds often enough - but I got up and traced the sounds. No ghosts ever worried me at Hohenfels."

Hendrik Louw, with his great love of rifle music, once fired an historic and deplorable shot. In the deep pool between Hohenfels and Grootderm lived the last hippo in the Orange River. One day in 1925 Louw shot it.

When you think of all the reckless shooting that went on during the lawless years, and the centuries of trapping and hunting by the Hottentots, it is remarkable that the Orange River hippos should have survived for so long. It is also interesting to trace their origin. Scully, the poet, studied them when he was a frontier magistrate early in the century; and he once told me that he thought they might have come down the coast all the way from Angola during an unusually rainy season hundreds of years ago.

Naturalists identified these hippo as the species known as *Hippopotamus Amphibius Capensis*. They were similar to the Berg River hippos, which became extinct in 1869. Wikar, the runaway Swede, saw large schools of hippo during his journey along the Orange. He was told that many Hottentots had been bitten in two by hippos; and an old man named Gouzep showed him a thigh scarred as a result of an encounter.

Wikar related an adventure with hippo which ended in tragedy. The Bushmen had wounded a hippo which had escaped to the river. It was forced out of the water by fish nibbling the wound, and Wikar then took a pot-shot at it. His blunderbuss bullet, half-lead, half-tin, failed to penetrate the skin, and the hippo made off again. It was winter, and that night the Bushmen made Wikar an “eykaro” (fire bed) by digging a trench, lighting a fire and warming the sand. After a restful night Wikar set off on the hippo trail again, and the wounded hippo was tracked and found dead. It was a great feast for the Bushmen. So gorged were they with meat that two women lay down to sleep on an elephant path and were trampled to death in the night by a huge bull elephant.

The Hottentots made large game pits, with thorn hedges converging on deep trenches. Wikar saw a hippo and a hartebees in one of these traps. On moonlight nights the hippos grazed far from the river, and then large bands of Hottentots intercepted them with assegais. In spite of its

bulk, a hippo can move fast; so the hunters worked in relays, a fresh band taking the place of those exhausted by circling, dodging and attacking the hippo.

Even in those days the hippos became rare near the drifts used by the Dutch East India Company’s explorers. The hippos seemed to know they would be shot at sight. At other places Wikar declared that when he shouted a hippo would approach him, filled with curiosity, to see what has caused the unusual sound.

Sir James Alexander found the Orange River estuary teeming with hippo. Here is his description of the river scene: “All those who have had the good fortune to see the Gariep agree in praising its beauty. Its broad stream at one time rushes tumultuously over a rocky and shelving bed; then is hurried over a rock four hundred feet high, forming a grand cataract; sweeps in its course round numerous islands, some of them inhabited by banditti, and others by hippopotami. Its banks are everywhere clothed with a broad belt of thorn, willow and

black bark trees, alive with the notes of birds, whilst the strangely shaped hills which so frequently enclose the river form the most exciting scenes, from their wildness and romance, that can possibly be conceived.”

Hottentots told Alexander that when the river came down in full flood, hippo were sometimes carried into the tree-tops and left there, trapped among the branches, when the water receded. Then the Hottentots would climb the trees and spear the helpless hippo. Strange hunting indeed.

Farini found hippo tusks above the Aughrabies Falls in 1886, but no hippo. Dr. Borchers of Upington told me that he remembered a farmer in 1907 shooting a hippo just below the falls. He was charged at Kenhardt with shooting Royal game and fined £10. The farmer had made the hippo hide into sjamboks and sold them for £45, so that the verdict did not disturb him. I have seen a police report, made by Sub-Inspector Bowden in 1908, in which he estimated that there were between twenty-four and thirty-six

hippo left in the river between Aughrabies and the sea.

Sometimes the hippo wandered a little way up the Fish River in wet seasons. Hippo spoor were seen there in 1910 and again in 1915; and Cornell, the prospector, recorded seeing hippo at the Fish-Orange junction on several occasions. Another spot favoured by the hippo during their last days was at Dabberas. Izko, the farmer of Aus, described to me how he watched a male, female and a young hippo for hours there.

The lone hippo shot by Hendrik Louw had a mate. Someone shot the mate in 1920, and for nearly five years the last hippo wallowed undisturbed in the Grootderm pool. Probably as a result of the loss of its mate it became restive. Hendrik Louw was painting his boat at the river's edge when he heard the familiar, booming hippo call.

He looked up and found the hippo between him and his homestead. The hippo advanced on him with huge jaws gaping. Louw, always quick on

the trigger, took no chances. One shot and the hippo dropped.

A photograph was taken showing “oom Hendrik” beside the hippo, and this fell into the hands of the police at Port Nolloth. The hippo fat had been converted into soap, while the traditional sjamboks had been made from the hide. Other portions of the carcass were found at Grootderm, and these were taken to court as exhibits. Louw pleaded self-defence and was acquitted, but to his intense disgust the sjamboks were confiscated. Thus passed the last hippo of the Orange River - and now the old hunter has gone, too.

Wild horses live on the islands near the Orange River mouth. As I drove towards the end of the river I saw them grazing on the river bank. They stood warily, like game animals, all heads turned in the direction of the jeep.

If you open a door of your car their leader, a white stallion, is away in a flash with the whole herd. They have long manes and tails; and they have developed thick hooves through standing always in the river silt. They ran away from the farms of the Louw brothers and went wild very early this century. I was told by old travellers that they were there nearly forty years ago, and by now there must be eighty horses in the herd.

They live on the islands for security, and because the reeds are good to eat. But when a flood is on its way down the river, instinct warns the horses to make for the river bank. Their knowledge is uncanny, and they are never cut off or drowned at such times.

Gemsbok also roam the cold, scrub-covered flats near the mouth and mingle with the horses. They came to the river in thin-ribbed hordes during the drought of 1946, but they needed grass as well as water and hundreds died. Ostriches also perished on the river bank. The diamond company's farm manager told me that he buried hundreds of gemsbok and ostriches to fertilise his garden.

On these sands at the river mouth you will often find the spoor of the strandwolf, the brown hyaena that seeks all the coast refuse from a fish to a dead seal or whale. "Wah-wah-wah." That is the strandwolf's cry as it goes scavenging along the lonely beaches. Little meat comes the way of this timid and unlovely creature. Often it is reduced to swimming out to the reefs and feeding on shellfish. It left the shores of Table Bay a century ago, and now it survives here in the Namib. "Wah-wah-wah." Perhaps the strandwolf has found a decayed penguin, washed up by the tide, and is whooping with delight.

One does not expect to find a lion in this region nowadays for they departed in the same way as the rhino, the giraffe and the elephant. In the southern districts of South-West Africa, lions are seen only far out on the Kalahari border. Yet a solitary lion prowled in the desert to the north of the Orange River mouth not long ago. When it was first reported the police scoffed at the idea and said it was a light brown baboon. Then four more men saw the lion at different times, and the

spoor was identified. It last appeared as recently as 1945 and I know a member of the Diamond Detective Department who still carries a rifle wherever he goes in the hope of shooting that lion. Probably the lion strayed away from the recognised lion country while following game, and has been able to satisfy its appetite in the Namib.

Bartholomew Diaz left a stone cross at Angra Pequena, but at the Orange River mouth he simply filled his water casks, marooned a wretched negress according to Portuguese custom and sailed southwards again. There is no record of the fate of the negress. Only the name Cape Voltas remains to mark the first landing ever made by white men in the land which is now the Union of South Africa.

Colonel Gordon's arrival at this spot is memorable because it was here that he met a party of Strandloopers, most elusive of all the

shy races encountered by early explorers. Gordon appears to have been the only man to leave a description of these people based on actual observation. First he came upon the remains of a feast - the bones of baboons and other animals. A little further on he found huts in which the framework was made of grampus skeletons. Eleven wretched human beings presented themselves. They indicated by signs that the place had been the home of a large tribe, but that some pestilence had carried off all the rest.

These people wore sealskins and jackal skins. They caught fish; and when a whale was cast on shore they ate the meat long after it had decayed. Water they carried in ostrich egg-shells and seal bladders. Bows and arrows were their weapons. Their bodies were smeared with oil. Unfortunately Colonel Gordon was too deeply concerned with other matters to give a more detailed account of the Strandloopers. It is a tantalising glimpse of these missing links in the world of anthropology.

The great interest surrounding the Strandloopers lies in the fact that they were relatives of the Boskop man - a type known only by their skulls, but identified definitely as very early men in the history of the African continent. When the Bushmen arrived, they treated the Strandloopers as inferior beings, and often killed them at sight. The Strandloopers must indeed have been inferior in that they preferred the life of the seashore and a diet mainly composed of shellfish; whereas the Bushmen were magnificent hunters and counted it a wasted day when they had no meat.

Strandlooper caves have revealed their method of burying their dead. The bodies were always placed within sound of the sea. They were painted with red ochre, and buried on their sides with the legs drawn up, just as prehistoric man slept. Large slabs of rock were placed on the bodies, and stone implements were left with them. The first joint of the little finger was always removed with a sharp stone during the Strandlooper's life-time for this secured for him

a happy afterlife of feasting in some heavenly cave.

Reconstructions of these bones suggest that the Strandloopers were never more than five feet in height. Some authorities declare they had peppercorn hair, sparkling eyes and haggard faces; others say they had infantile features. The women decorated themselves with beads of ostrich egg-shell, while the men carried bows, poisoned arrows, bamboo harpoons for fishing, and stone hammers.

The kitchen middens of the Strandloopers, under which hundreds of skeletons have been found, have given useful proof of the varieties of vanished wild life in different parts of South Africa. In some were discovered an extraordinary miscellany of hippo and elephant bones mixed with bush pig tusks, buck and bird bones, crab claws, tortoise carapace and the inevitable mussel shells.

Such were the Strandloopers of the past. They shared with the Bushmen the art of painting on

rocks. Many more relics of those far-off days must remain hidden in the sands and caves of the South African coast.

Captain Alexander, of course, was the man who gave his name to Alexander Bay. Soldier and explorer, he was quick to notice the blank spaces on the maps near the Orange River mouth; and he arrived here in 1836, hunting, prospecting and searching for harbours. There was not a thought of diamonds in his head. Copper was what he was after, and the Hottentots brought him samples that met with his approval. A man of action, he decided to mine the copper ore forty miles up the river in the Richtersveld.

The ruins of Alexander's buildings, the barge slipways and other signs of enterprise still remain on the south bank of the Orange River near the mouth. For years the position of Alexander's copper mine remained a mystery; but it was rediscovered in 1928 by Ernest Heyes, a

tireless prospector who had worked for many years in the remote bends of the river. A Bushman led him to the spot, under a mountain shaped like an eagle's head. The tracks of Alexander's wagons were still there; and carved on a rock he found the inscription "J.A. 1838." Near the river bank lay an old ship's mast. Fragments of English crockery littered the stone houses where Alexander's hundred Cornish miners lived. The copper was sent down to the river mouth on rafts and in barges, and was then carried overland in wagons to be loaded into schooners at Alexander Bay. Alexander was knighted for the discoveries he made along this coast. Like many others, he missed the diamonds; but, he, too, showed infinite fortitude in a region which at that time was wild and unknown. The Eagle Eye mine remains as he left it in the great solitude.

Half a century after Alexander the German pioneer, Adolf Luderitz, arrived on the north bank of the Orange River on his last, tragic journey. Luderitz had set up a trading station at

Angra Pequena; now he was exploring the hinterland in the hope of discovering copper or gold.

Luderitz had Bethanie Hottentot guides and two well-equipped wagons. His white companions were Heinrich Iselin, a Swiss mining engineer; a Scottish miner named Hoskins; and Steingrover, a sailor from Luderitz's schooner *Meta*. The expedition reached the river at Nabas Drift, about fifty miles by water from the mouth.

There the boats were unloaded. Luderitz had brought two folding canvas boats from Germany with him - boats twelve feet in length with a beam of four feet and weighing eighty eight pounds apiece. It was a difficult journey downstream, and the boats had to be carried over the shallows and rocks fifty-five times before the party reached Arries Drift. At this spot, twenty miles from the river mouth, Iselin and Hoskins tried to persuade Luderitz to return to Angra Pequena overland. Luderitz had planned a suicidal voyage by sea; and the

two mining men rightly refused to take part in it. Steingrover, who should have known better, supported Luderitz.

So at Arries Drift the expedition broke up. Luderitz wrote three letters, including one to Mr. Poppe, a Cape Town shipping agent, in which he described his plans. On October 22nd, 1886, Luderitz and Steingrover reached Kortdoorn, four miles from the river entrance, and found one Reynier Coetzee there. Coetzee, who knew how dangerous the coast could be, begged them to give up the idea of a sea voyage in a canvas boat. It appears that Luderitz was almost persuaded, but the pig-headed Steingrover tipped the scale by pointing out that he was an experienced seaman and knew what he was doing.

Coetzee reluctantly lent Luderitz the services of two coloured men to carry the boat and stores to Alexander Bay. The boat contained a canvas water bag, blankets and food for fourteen days. They cut down a small tree to use as a mast, and their only sail was a bed-

sheet. There was no room for an anchor, but they had oars. Next day they rowed out of Alexander Bay, and Coetzee saw them off the river mouth hoisting their sail.

After that the fate of Luderitz and his companion became a deep mystery. Luderitz's schooner *Meta*, which was at Angra Pequena, searched the whole coast south to the Orange River and visited all the guano islands without finding a trace of the missing men. At the request of the German Consul-General, the Cape Government sent a magistrate, Mr. John T. Eustace, in an ox-wagon to the Orange River mouth to take statements.

It would have been a miracle if Luderitz had survived the voyage in that frail boat. Mr. Eustace was told that a gale had blown up on the day after Luderitz had set sail. Clearly the two men had been drowned.

Yet Luderitz almost became a legend, like Colonel Fawcett in Brazil. There were some who declared that he was living in the Orange River

wilderness. For nearly a quarter of a century the exact details of the disappearance remained a mystery.

Then old Klinghardt, on one of his surveying trips along the coast in 1908, found fragments which were identified as parts of Luderitz's canvas boat. The fragments, washed up on a beach about twenty-five miles north of the Orange River mouth, were sent to the Berlin Museum. Klinghardt set up a memorial stone at the spot.

There is an unconfirmed story, told to a German officer by a Bushman in 1909, that two white men had landed from a small boat at Angras Juntas many years previously, and had been murdered by Bushmen. Possibly the tale was true, but the victims could not have been Luderitz and Steingrover. Angras Juntas is a hundred miles north of the river, and a long way from the beach where Klinghardt discovered the wreckage of Luderitz's crazy canvas boat.

Reuning and Klinghardt discovered a shaft sunk by Luderitz's prospector Pohle near Arries Drift during a journey in 1885. Pohle was evidently the first man to seek diamonds in this area. He left it on record that he sunk the shaft "in order to examine the sedimentary layers, hoping to make some discovery, it might be diamonds or gold, in the sand."

I found a little monument among the beach dunes on the north bank, a beacon of cinders and cement put up by the shore party of the German gunboat *Moewe* to mark the end of their long task of charting the coast. The names of one officer and six ratings are inscribed on it, with the date August, 1912. Close by is a memorial to Kurt Eberlanz, drowned at the river mouth in 1937 - one of several men who, like Luderitz and Steingrover, became victims of the treacherous currents. A fishing cutter was wrecked there, too, in 1939, and the crew were lost.

Years ago there were trees along this beach, but in the early days of the diamond diggings they were cut down by detectives. It was thought that the trees might serve as landmarks for people who had diamonds to bury. Now there is only the kareedoring bush on the dunes, yellowed by the salty soil. And always, above high-water mark, you see the driftwood. Whole trees lie there after their voyage down the flooded river; trees with the bark torn off by sharp rocks.

In the years when the sand closes the river mouth, the bridge is about three miles in length. At such times the level of the imprisoned river may be several feet above sea level. Once in six years, perhaps, the river is dammed up in this way; but it is impossible to be sure, for no one kept records or even remembered such events accurately before the Louws settled at the river mouth.

The breach in the sand bridge is sometimes six hundred yards wide, and it always occurs in the southern part. Hendrik Louw once tried to cut through the sand, for the river water was

flooding the islands where his cattle grazed. He had no success. The seas very soon closed his gap. In recent years dynamite has been used for the same purpose, but without effect. The river finds its way to the sea in its own time, and the natural process cannot be hastened.

Sailing ships calling for Alexander's copper, and at later dates, sometimes sent their boats up the Orange River to fill the casks with fresh water. I do not think any boat has attempted to enter the river during the whole of this century, though it could probably still be done under the right conditions. The difficulties were obviously unknown to a company which was formed in Port Elizabeth in 1882 to open up the navigation of the Orange River. A small steamer was built in England for the purpose and the enterprise was widely advertised. Only then did the company promoters learn the disconcerting news that there was no channel into the river for anything larger than a dinghy.

There was an amusing sequel to this enterprise. Jules Verne, the imaginative writer, heard of the

ship that was being built, but not of the failure of the scheme. He wrote a brilliant description of a voyage into the South African desert.

In recent years a company proposed to send a dredger into the Orange to bring up diamonds from the bed of the river. It never came to anything, and I doubt whether the investors would have received a fair return for their money.

Alexander Bay, the State diamond camp, is lighting up as I stand here in the dusk. It is brightly lit within the barbed wire for obvious reasons - apart from the population of eight hundred people. I am thinking of the pleasant day I spent with Mr. C. J. Grobler; the superintendent, in this stronghold. No settlement in the Union is further from a railhead than Alexander Bay. It is the most westerly point of the Union. The diggings provide work (at eight to ten shillings a day, and all found) for scores of young Namaqualanders who are saving up to go farming. I expected formalities and X-rays when I passed through the gates.

Instead, there was a friendly welcome, no fuss at all in the midst of incredible wealth. They showed me one boulder which, when lifted, revealed 487 diamonds.

It is dark now, and the sea wind is cold on the sand bridge. Yet I am reluctant to go. There is one final drama of the river which is seen here only at intervals of years. It is no use waiting; yet it is a scene I have often imagined and I shall think of it whenever I hear that the Groot Rivier is coming down in flood.

This is what happens. The massive sand wall builds up in winter until it stretches unbroken from South-West Africa to Namaqualand. For months on end the sand bridge holds the water in check. At last the strain becomes intense. The whole wall shivers and pulsates. Still it holds, though the floods are sweeping down the river and the end is inevitable.

Sergeant Van Zyl of the police once chose this very hour to ride out along the sand bridge with a companion to watch the arrival of the flood waters. “We did not know what to expect, but the horses warned us by their behaviour,” said Van Zyl. “The river was damming up all the time - a sensational spectacle. We rode across from north to south, then turned the reluctant horses and rode back. Soon it became a gallop for life, with the sand quaking under the horses’ hooves, and the bridge growing narrower every moment.”

Then it burst. Only a few men have watched the bursting, though many have heard the sound. Van Zyl said it was like dynamite. The noise of the explosion travels for miles up the river, and everyone knows the meaning. The sand bridge has collapsed. And once again the muddy Groot Rivier is thundering over the bar and mingling riotously with the blue ocean.

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Bogenfels	Farini, GA
Borcherds, Dr. W. M.	Ferreira raid
Brakbos Island	Friersdale

Garub
Geinab
Gemsbok Park
Gill, Sir David
Goodhouse
Great Commissioner's Pan
Great Snake
Grootderm
Grootkolk
Haakiesdoorn
Haakscheen Pan
Halliburton
Hastings, Major Lewis
Heirachabis
Heyes, Ernest
Hippo (Orange River)
Hohenfels
Ironside, Field Marshall E
Islands, Orange River
Izko, F. P.
Jackson, Albert
Kalahari Floods
Karas mountains

Kenhardt
King's Rest
Kitchener, Lord
Klaas Island
Kling, Rev. H
Klinghardt, Georg
Korn, Dr. E.
Krapohl, H. J. C.
Kubiskow
Ky Ky
Landwehr, Fritz
Le Riche, Christoffel
Leitland's Pan
Lewis, A. D.
Lost City
Louriesfontein
Louw, "
Giel,"
Louw, Gert
Louw, Hendrik
Luchtenstein, Ernst
Luderitz, Adolf
Lukas, Klaas

Lutz, Heinrich
Lutz, Japie
Martin, Dr. H.
Matthys, Titus
McDonald, Frikkie
McShane
Merensky, Dr. H.
Mier
Molentswane
Molopo
Nakob
Nel, Ben
Nel, Piet
Nossob
Onseepkans
Orange Mouth
Pabst, Father
Paver, F. R.
Peacock, J. A.
Pella
Peringuey, Dr.
Poggenpoel, Dirk
Presgrave

Pritchard, D. D.
Rabinowitz, S
Rashleigh, E. C.
Rautenbach brothers
Reitz, Chief Justice
Reuning, Dr. E.
Rhenish Mission
Rietfontein
Schroder, Rev
Schwarz, Prof. E.H.L.
Scotland, Alexander
Scott, J.H.
Scuit Drift
Sendeling's Drift
Simon, Father
Skanskop Island
Smith, Scotty
Spangenberg, Willem
Sperrgebiet
Strandlopers
Thirstland Trekkers
Thompson, George
Trew, Lt.-Col. H.F.

Twee Rivieren
Union's End
Upington
Upington, Sir Thomas
Van der Merwe, Mr. H.Z.
Van ZYL, J.W.
Vilander, David
Vilander, Dirk
Vioolsdrift
Von Eskert, Capt. F.
Von Schauroth, E
Weidner, Carl
Wicht, Dr. J.
Wicht, H.H.
Wikar
Witbooi, Hendrik
Wolf, Bay
Wolf, Father
Wondergat
Zwartmodder